

“Ida”

or

The Mystery of the
Nun's Grave at Vale Royal
in Cheshire.

By J. H. COOKE.

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To my friend
Mr Francis Joseph Poole
Solicitor Sandbach.
With the authors compliments
& best wishes

Yours truly

Nov: 29th 1912 J H COOKE

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MACKIE & CO. LD.,
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WARRINGTON AND LONDON.



Alf Cooke, Ltd., Leeds & London.

The Dowry of Prince Edward, afterwards King Edward the First, reproduced for the first time from an original glass panel at Dale Royal in Cheshire.

Ida

OR

THE MYSTERY OF THE NUN'S GRAVE

AT

VALE ROYAL ABBEY, CHESHIRE.

An Historical Novel

GIVING A PICTORIAL ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE OF THE
MONKS AND NUNS IN THE
DISSOLVED MONASTIC INSTITUTIONS OF VALE ROYAL ABBEY, NORTON
PRIORY, RUNCORN, AND ST. MARY'S NUNNERY, CHESTER,
IN THE TIMES OF

EDWARD I., EDWARD II., AND EDWARD III.
(A.D. 1277 TO 1336),

WITH

A TRANSLATION OF THE CHRONICLE OF THE FOUNDATION OF VALE ROYAL
ABBAY AND THE LIVES OF THE FIRST FOUR ABBOTS, WRITTEN
BY THE FIFTH ABBOT, AND NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED.

BY

JOHN HENRY COOKE,

AUTHOR OF "THE QUEEN'S DIAMOND JUBILEE IN CHESHIRE"
AND "BIBLIOTHECA CESTRIENSIS." (1904)

1912.

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THIS BOOK

IS REVERENTLY DEDICATED

TO THE MEMORY OF

The Monks and Nuns of England,

WHO IN THE DARK AGES OF THE

TWELFTH, THIRTEENTH AND FOURTEENTH CENTURIES

TRIMMED THEIR LAMPS IN SOLITUDE AND KEPT

“THE LIGHT”

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Tanner's "Notitia Monastica."

Dugdale's "Monasticon Anglicanum."

Ormerod's "History of the County of Cheshire."

Lysons' "Cheshire."

Doyle's "Chronicle of England, B.C. 55—A.D. 1485."

Dr. Maitland: "The Dark Ages."

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Beamont's "History of the Castle of Halton and Abbey of Norton."

The Chester Archæological Society's Journal, particularly Mr. Fergusson Irvine's Paper on "Notes on the History of St. Mary's Nunnery, Chester."

Dr. Jessop's "The Coming of the Friars."

Father Rudolph's "The Monks of Old Chester."

Beamont's "Account of the ancient Town of Frodsham."

Mrs. Armitage's "Key to English Antiquities" (kindly lent me by my friend Mr. W. Handley, J.P.).

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- "Chester during the Plantagenet and Tudor Periods," by Canon Morris, D.D.
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- “The Nun’s Rule, or Ancræn Riwlē”; modernised by James Morton. The King’s Classics, published by Alexander Moring, Limited, London.

- “The Cistercian Abbey of Beaulieu in the County of Southampton,” by W. H. St. John Hope, M.A., and Harold Brakspear, F.S.A.
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- “Cistercian Statutes A.D. 1256–7, with Supplementary Statutes of the Order A.D. 1257–88,” edited by the Rev. J. T. Fowler, M.A., F.S.A.; reprinted from the Yorkshire Archæological Journal.
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CORRIGENDA.

On page XXIV. of Introduction, read "B.V. Mary," instead of "B.M. Mary."

On page XXVI. of Introduction, read "Sir Charles Holcroft, Bart.," instead of "Sir George Holcroft. Bart.,"; also on same page, read "George Harry Holcroft, Esq.," instead of "George Holcroft. Esq."

Page 50, 7th line from bottom, read "begotten" instead of "begotton."

Page 170, 10th line from bottom, read "Knight," instead of "Baronet."

Page 368, 12th line from top, read "ready" for "roady."

Page 369, the quotation for this chapter should read as follows:—

"Life is a leaf of paper white,
Whereon each one of us may write
His word or two, and then comes night."

Page 373, sixth line from top, read "Fleshmongers Lane," instead of "Fishmongers Lane."

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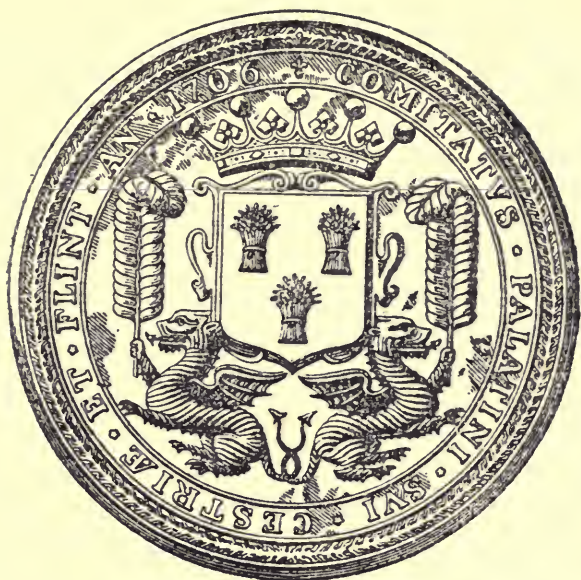
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THE LAST SEAL WHICH WAS IN USE WHEN THE CHESTER PALATINATE COURT WAS DISSOLVED.

[Taken from "The County Palatine of Chester," by kind permission of H. Taylor, Esqre, F.S.A., of Chester.]

INTRODUCTION.

MANY, many years ago, longer than I care to remember, I had the misfortune to attend the public sale of the few literary and antiquarian relics of a dear old friend who has now passed away and long ago joined the great majority. Possibly as a warning to others, as well as myself, I must confess it was a sale under what lawyers term a *fi. fa.*, otherwise a writ of execution against the goods, &c., by the High Sheriff of the County.. Some odd unbound numbers of The Lancashire and Cheshire Historic Society were

knocked down to me for sixpence. A copy of Egerton Leigh's Cheshire "Ballads and Legends" became my property for a trifle more.

Studying these in detail, as well as others, I began to interest myself in the subject of Topography—in simpler words "local history." One or two of my keen financial friends will possibly say that this sixpence was a bad investment: it certainly has involved me in the purchase of many other Cheshire books resulting in months and years of happy and pleasant research, which a commercial acquaintance once would have told me could have been more profitably occupied. Yet, withal, there is no more genial occupation to a busy man than to have a "hobby," and of all the "hobby horses" I have ever ridden, none can compare with the one I have christened "Topography."

Because I saw printed in Roman letters the words "The Nun's Grave" on the Ordnance Survey associated with Vale Royal, I ultimately studied Monastic life as associated with the county and district in which I have had the honour and pleasure to reside all my lifetime. I am not a bigot in religious matters—hence my desire to find out the simple, honest truth. So, when I took in hand the Monk and the Nun of six hundred years ago, I tried to discover their true lives and characters as set out in innumerable books, ancient as well as modern; I checked the dates and the statements made in half-a-dozen different ways, all with one object—to make my hobby presentable, and to give as correct a picture as circumstances and records of the past ages would permit. That this was absolutely necessary is proved by a reference to one single instance which relates to the story told in this book. It is stated over and over again in the most authentic works relating

to Cheshire, that Vale Royal Abbey was founded in 1277 by King Edward I., in pursuance of a vow made when nearly suffering shipwreck *on his return from the Crusades in the Holy Land*. Ormerod, Lysons, and other writers all affirm the above statement. With true poetic licence, the genial Cheshire poet, Egerton Leigh, fixes the place of shipwreck some time after the Prince had left the Island of Sicily. The mistake, (set out in the words printed in italics), is, to a certain extent quite excusable, for the Abbey Leger, in glowing terms, written within one hundred years after King Edward laid the foundation stone, tells us "now this same Edward was so keen a fighter that for love of the Cross he had *several times* visited the Holy Land to exterminate the Pagans, and *on one occasion when he was returning back to England* he came down to the sea," and then follows a graphic account of the shipwreck and the vow the Prince made. The *Times*, in a recent article referring to this very same Edward I. promising the Welsh a Prince who was born in Wales and who could not speak a word of English, and afterwards producing his one-month-old child to them, born at Carnarvon, says: "It is a pity sometimes to disturb tradition even for the sake of truth." I am, therefore, somewhat reluctant to traverse the statement associating this particular shipwreck with the Prince's return from the Holy Land. I am afraid, however, it is only a very pretty embellishment, quite pardonable when it is remembered that the Abbey Leger was written in the days when letter paper, at least in this country, was extremely scarce, and newspapers, railways, telegraphs, and postal deliveries were not even dreamt of. Yet it must naturally be enquired, How do we know the statement is not correct? It is only by checking statement after statement, and the

examination of files of State Papers, written in that period and very recently brought to light, that we can construct the whole correctly. Prince Edward only went to the Holy Land on one occasion, namely, when he set sail from Dover on the 20th August, 1270. He did not return to England until after the death of his father, Henry III., which occurred on the 16th November, 1272, and the news of that death reached him at Sicily. The date of the Foundation Charter of the Abbey of Darnhall, (to which place the Monks from Doré, in Herefordshire, were, in pursuance of the vow, first sent by Prince Edward, prior to their translation to Vale Royal), is the 2nd of August, 1269, a year before the Prince set sail for the Holy Land. Moreover, that charter granted by Prince Edward states, that, "we being sometime in danger at sea" have founded the Abbey at Darnhall, a monastery of the Cistercian order. No mention is made in the charter connecting the shipwreck with the Prince's voyage to or from the Holy Land: indeed it could not be correctly referred to.

The charter issued by King Edward in respect of Vale Royal Abbey is dated 1299, "upon a vow once made, being in danger of shipwreck." Again no reference to the Holy Land. We are therefore compelled to look for some shipwreck prior to 1269, as the occasion when the vow was made at sea to build a monastery. The "Dictionary of National Biography," in an article written by the Rev. W. Hunt, under the head of Edward I., states that he as Prince Edward in the year 1263 immediately after Christmas set sail for France and "*had a stormy passage and made vows for his safety.*"

Sir James Ramsay in his "Dawn of the Constitution" (page 210) says Henry III. crossed from Dover to Calais

on the 2nd January, 1264, and Prince Edward his son had gone over a few days before. It seems therefore certain that the vow could not have been made on his return journey from the Holy Land in 1272, but was made shortly after Christmas, 1263.

Such a date also more correctly coincides with the statement in Tanner's "Notitia Monastica" that "Prince Edward, eldest son of King Henry III., began in his Father's lifetime, viz., A.D. 1266, an Abbey in his manor of Dernhale for one hundred monks of the Cistercian order. But when he became King, 1277, he laid the foundation of a stately monastery not far from thence, in a more pleasant situation, which he called Vale Royal."

The dates set out in the Abbey Leger are as follows:—

- (1.) Monks quitted monastery of Doré 5th Ides of January, 1273,
(i.e. 9th of January).
- (2.) Monks arrived at Dernhale, 19th Kalends of February, 1273,
(i.e. 14th January).
- (3.) Vale Royal consecrated by Anian the 2nd (Bishop of St. Asaph)
9th Kalends August, 1277 (i.e. 24th July).
- (4.) Edward I. laid Foundation Stone of High Altar, Ides of
August, 1277 (i.e. 13th August).
- (5.) Monks transferred from Dernhale to temporary buildings at
Vale Royal 3rd Ides of March, 1281 (i.e. 13th March).
- (6.) Monks transferred from temporary buildings to the New Abbey
at Vale Royal on Feast of Assumption of Virgin Mary,
1330 (i.e. 15th of August).

When studied closely, none of these dates conflict with what has been previously stated, for the Prince may have begun to build or to alter or reconstruct the Norman Earl's Manor House at Darnhall in 1266, and it may not have been ready for occupation by the Monks of Doré until 1273, as stated in the Leger. With regard to

these dates the following ancient inscriptions still appear in one of the bedrooms at Vale Royal:—

“King Edward in fulfilment of a vow to the B.M. Mary for preserving him from shipwreck layed August 2nd, 1277, the first stone of this Abbaye, which he caused to be named Valle Royale.”

On the other panel is:—“Queen Eleanor layed two stones of this Abbaye of Valle Royale, one for herself and one for her sonne Alphonso, August ye 12th, 1277, in the presence of King Edward and his nobles.”

Notice the first date is August 2nd and the second August 12th, and also that King Edward I. was present on each occasion: also that no reference is made to the Holy Land. Notice too that neither date agrees with the date given in the Abbey Leger, viz., the 13th August, 1277.

The following is an extract from Gough's “Itinerary and Journies of Edward I.” recently compiled from State Papers:—

1277, July 4th to 7th	...	...	at Worcester.
„ „ 14th	...	...	at Darnhall.
„ „ 15th to 21st	...	...	at Chester.
„ „ 26th to 29th	...	...	at Basingwerk near Flint.
„ August 1st to 5th	...	...	at Birkenhead.
„ „ 6th	...	...	at Stanlow.
„ „ 7th, 8th, & 9th	...	...	at Wallerscoat, near Vale Royal.
„ „ 10th & 11th	...	...	at Ince.
„ „ 12th & 13th	...	...	at Bromborough.
„ „ 16th to 18th	...	...	at Chester.
„ „ 18th	...	...	at Basingwerk.
„ „ 19th	...	...	at Chester.
„ „ 20th to 23rd	...	...	at Basingwerk.
„ „ 24th	...	...	at St. Asaph.
1278, September 23rd	...	...	at Ince.
„ „ 24th	...	...	at Vale Royal.

1283,	September	6th	...	...	at Vale Royal.
"	"	10th to 21st	...	...	at Macclesfield.
"	"	26th	...	...	at Combermere.

In relation to the above, it must not be forgotten that Vale Royal was not known by that name until King Edward had been there and directed it to be so called: its former name was "Quetenne halewes," which means "holy wheat." As the State Papers show, he was at "Wallerscoat, near Vale Royal" on the 7th, 8th and 9th August, it is evident the King must have been at Vale Royal at the same time, as probably those dates are the dates when the name "Vale Royal" first appeared. So far no reason can be assigned for his visit to "Wallerscoat," unless associated with Vale Royal, from which place it is distant about three miles.

I have only given the above illustrations to show the difficulties which surround one in stating dates and circumstances several hundred years ago, with absolute accuracy: possibly it may also convince any reader, who may honour me by a perusal of this historical novel, that considerable research has, of necessity, taken place to find out the large substratum of truth which permeates the element of fiction on which otherwise the book is based. My chief object has been to get my readers to study history—more particularly local history.

Looking at the green sward, in front of the present mansion, who would ever guess that the site was formerly occupied by the finest and largest Cistercian Abbey Church in this country? Yet, through the kindness and generosity of Robert Dempster, Esq., the present lessee of Vale Royal, that fact has now actually been established. It was at least twenty feet longer than Fountains Abbey Church, which had hitherto claimed that distinguishing feature. We are

proud of Royal visits: it is only History which tells us that the great warrior and statesman Edward I., and his beautiful Queen Eleanor of Castile, rode on horseback along our roads, and laid foundation stones in our midst.

This same King Edward set an example unsurpassed by any modern monarch in the matter of active life and work, and travelling as he did twenty and thirty miles a day on horseback along almost impassable roads, he subdued Wales, conquered Scotland, and established our first Parliament. It was he, too, who brought from Scone in Scotland the Coronation stone on which our Kings and Queens have been crowned, and who caused to be constructed by Master Walter, for the sum of 100 shillings the Coronation chair in which the historic stone is placed.

Again, this zeal for local history has unearthed the finest bit of ancient literary composition which has ever been written—the *Chronicles of the Foundation of Vale Royal*—all of which is, for the first time, faithfully and correctly set out in this novel. Let the reader think of it as composed centuries before the birth of Shakespeare and Milton. The translation of the *Abbey Chronicle* and *Leger* took several months of great care and greater ability by an eminent translator. Towards the cost of this, I have to thank Sir George Holcroft, Bart., of The Shrubbery, Summerhill, Kingswinford (whose ancestors were immediately interested in Vale Royal), his nephew George Holcroft, Esq., of Stourbridge, Robert Dempster, Esq., and W. H. Verdin, Esq., D.L., J.P., of Darnhall Hall, where the monks were first located.

I have further to thank my friend J. J. Phelps, Esq., of 46, The Park, Eccles, Manchester, the Hon. Sec. of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society, for innumer-

able suggestions. He it was who pointed out to me on the ordnance map of to-day the site of the line of crosses from Vale Royal to Darnhall, and discussed with me for hours together the dates I have previously given, and invested the dead stones with new life. That stone cross over the Nun's grave has been the subject of mutual thought for days together, and of long and interesting letters to and from the learned Abbot Gasquet and the Rev. Father Norbert Birt, O.S.B., of London. Even now it remains a puzzle why this Abbey Church was dedicated to, amongst others, St. Nicholas and St. Nicasius, except that the former was the patron saint of the shipwrecked mariner. It was also Mr. Phelps who introduced me to my esteemed friend Basil Pendleton, Esq., architect, of 16, Brazennose Street, Albert Square, Manchester. His great knowledge of Cistercian and monastic architecture has been invaluable. He has given weeks and days to the superintendence of the excavations, and I am sure is just as proud of his new discovery as we are all proud of him. There was little to indicate the site of the Abbey Church, yet, under his direction, the probing iron almost immediately brought us in contact with the hidden and buried foundations, and soon the magnificence of size and detail appeared, proving that Vale Royal must have been what King Edward said it should be "his will that there should be no monastery more royal than this one, in liberties, wealth and honour throughout the whole world." To the Yorkshire Archæological Society I am indebted for liberty to produce the ground plan of another Cistercian Abbey, "Fountains" in Yorkshire, (prepared by that well-known archæological expert Mr. St. John Hope), thus giving the probable outline of what Vale Royal must have

been. I must also express my thanks to Abbot Gasquet, the learned author of "English Monastic Life," and especially to his publishers, Messrs. Methuen and Company, of 36, Essex Street, London, for permission to take copious extracts showing the duties of the various monastic officers usually appointed in a monastery.

We see powerful steam engines, traversing the country from one end to the other. Each such engine represents years of thought by the highest talent the Empire has ever possessed. No one man produced it—our present engineers have built upon the reputation, knowledge and skill of dead men. So it is with history and books relating to historical subjects. With the help of friends I can only claim to have specialized on a few square yards of this vast Empire; to have rooted more particularly into a great King's association with a very small district; to have unearthed in a small way documents and facts which have lain covered with the dust of five hundred years. All the credit, if credit there be, should be heaped upon those mighty busy bees who so long ago left us such a rich inheritance, which, by the aid of printing and general knowledge, everyone can now enjoy. I have simply summarized and tabulated, in my own poor way, some of the dead facts of what Dr. Maitland aptly styles "The Dark Ages." No more remarkable or interesting book than that has been written or published on this subject. It is now out of print. Yet withal Maitland says "I know nothing of the ages which knew nothing."

Frederick Stokes, M.A., who wrote an introduction to the fifth edition of Dr. Maitland's book, summarizes the position very forcibly when he says "On the whole one is tempted to believe that the dark ages were not so very

dark, nor our own times so very full of light, as some of the authors criticized by Maitland would have us believe.

“Men lived rougher and simpler lives, but it does not follow that they led less happy ones. It is doubtful whether the influences of the nineteenth century do not tend to degrade men rather than to elevate them. The individual withers, and the State is more and more.

“There is scant opportunity for prayer and repose in the restless commonplace age in which we live. The whole atmosphere of the times is fatal to that spirit of faith which is the motive power of all real progress.”

If those words were true in 1890, how much more appropriate to this present year 1911.

To prove that there were clever, tactful men among the monks, in the truest sense of the word, in those by-gone ages, one may perhaps be permitted, by way of relief from dry detail, as a Preface or Introduction often is, to quote the following story from a note in Maitland's Book. “A certain priest who saw his Bishop playing at dice, shook his head in a scornful manner. The prelate, perceiving it, was very angry and told the priest that if he did not show him that what he was doing was forbidden by the canon law, he would immediately send him to gaol. The priest with an aspect of horror, fell at his feet, and said, ‘Pardon me, my lord, I am so overwhelmed with fear that I could not repeat even the first verse of the first psalm’ (the very alphabet of a priest in those days), ‘nor any one decree from the canons; but I beseech you, most pious prelate, that you would recall to my mind, what in my terror I have quite lost.’ On this the bishop, and the rest of the company, began to laugh and jest; but the priest, being still urgent, the Bishop yielded to his entreaties, and repeated a couple

of verses:—"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord *and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*" 'Very right, most holy father,' cried the priest, 'and then the rest of your time you may play at dice.'"

Summarizing his study of monastic life, Dr. Maitland very ably states his views as follows: "It is quite impossible to touch the subject of Monasticism without rubbing off some of the dirt which has been heaped upon it. It is impossible to get even a superficial knowledge of the mediæval history of Europe, without seeing how greatly the world of that period was indebted to the Monastic orders; and feeling that, whether they were good or bad in other matters, Monasteries were beyond all price in those days of misrule and turbulence, as places where (it may be imperfectly, yet better than elsewhere) God was worshipped—as a quiet and religious refuge for helpless infancy and old age, a shelter of respectful sympathy for the orphan, maiden and the desolate widow—as central points whence agriculture was to spread over bleak hills, and barren downs, and marshy plains, and deal bread to millions perishing with hunger and its pestilential train—as repositories of the learning which then was, and well springs for the learning which was to be—as nurseries of art and science, giving the stimulus, the means, and the reward to invention and aggregating around them every head that could devise, and every hand that could execute,—as the nucleus of the City which in after days of pride should crown its palaces and bulwarks with the towering cross of its Cathedral."

Abbot Gasquet says: "Two great and fruitful ideas were

kept constantly before the mind of the nation by the existence of these monastic houses—the life of perpetual praise and the life of associated labour. *Laborare et orare*—to work and to pray—was the familar principle which animated the course of every well conducted house, and which was, so to speak, the conservation of the spiritual forces, whereby the energy of faithful work became interchangeable with the energy of unremitting prayer. . . . To carry out this principle of perpetual praise with the utmost solemnity attainable was the first end of monastic life.

“ But though the service of God was beyond all question the prime object of monastic life, yet the more closely that life is examined, the more clearly does it exhibit the element of associated labour. In the popular estimate current at the present day. . . . it is not unusual to imagine that a monk, although possibly a pious, was at all events a very indolent personage, and that the utmost he accomplished was to mumble—he was always supposed to mumble—a good many more prayers than other people, and to live on the fat of the land.”

Another writer, Mr. Thorold Rogers, should also be quoted :—“ The monks were men of letters in the middle ages, the historians, the jurists, the philosophers, the physicians, the students of nature, the founders of schools, authors of chronicles, teachers of agriculture, fairly indulgent landlords, and advocates of genuine dealing towards the peasantry.”

Before closing this introduction I must express my indebtedness to those interested in Vale Royal, for liberty to take photographs of several subjects connected with the old Abbey and the Nun's grave, many of which are

reproduced so as to make this novel somewhat unique, and certainly more interesting.

I have also to thank Miss Stokes, of 75, Chancery Lane, London, for the great care and skill she has exercised in translating the Abbey Chronicle. The whole of the Leger with interesting records is to appear later, accompanied by valuable information obtained from the excavations permitted by Mr. Dempster the lessee, and Mr. J. P. Jackson the land agent of the Delamere estate, and largely superintended by my friends, Messrs. J. J. Phelps and Basil Pendleton. A list of books I have studied is appended, and to those authors, for general information obtained, I express my acknowledgments and thanks.

As far as I have been able to ascertain, this novel may claim to be somewhat original, because it is an attempt, somewhat imperfectly no doubt, to illustrate for the first time, by means of word pictures, monastic life in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. I therefore claim the indulgence of my readers.

JNO. H. COOKE.

*Crossfield House,
Winsford, Cheshire,
December, 1911.*



Alf Cook, Ltd., Leeds & London.

General View of the Sun's Grave.



COAT OF ARMS OF THE FAMILY OF CHOLMONDELEY OF VALE ROYAL.
[Taken from Ormerod's "History of Cheshire."]

CHAPTER I.

THE NUN'S GRAVE.

"The souls of those that die
Are but sunbeams lifted higher."

If anyone will trouble to search the Ordnance Survey
Map for the Parish of Whitegate in our ancient County

Palatine of Cheshire, he will find marked upon it the ancestral seat of the Cholmondeley family. The site has been known for the last six hundred years by the regal title of "The Vale Royal of England," for it was on this spot that King Edward I. on the 13th day of August, 1277, amid great pomp and splendour, laid the foundation stone of the High Altar of a Royal Abbey. St. Mary's Monastery (as it was then religiously styled) was erected by the First Edward at a cost equivalent to half a million pounds sterling of our present day money, in performance of a sacred vow he made when a Prince. The Abbey Leger tells us that Prince Edward, before he succeeded to the throne on the death of his father King Henry the Third (on the 16th November, 1272), on his return from an expedition to the Holy Land, was on the point of suffering shipwreck in a dreadful storm when he made a vow to the Virgin, that if she interposed her aid for the preservation of himself and his crew, he would found a convent on his return, for a hundred monks of the Cistercian Order. The vow was instantly accepted, the vessel righted herself and was miraculously brought safely into port; the sailors disembarked, and the Prince landed last; upon which the charm ceased, the vessel divided and every fragment of the wreck vanished under the waters. History further tells us that Prince Edward, some short time afterwards, was held as hostage by the rebellious Barons of England, led by Simon de Montfort, the Great Earl of Leicester. As such hostage he had to accompany De Montfort, and amongst other places, he was imprisoned at Hereford. During his imprisonment there, the Prince received many kindnesses from the Monks of the Cistercian Order, then located at Doré Abbey, not far distant from the City of Hereford.

X

They visited him, gave him information of what was going on outside, and solaced him with their sympathy. Probably they might have assisted in his escape, for on Thursday, the 28th May, 1265, the Prince was allowed to go a ride for an airing in the meadows on the north side of the City, in the company of Thomas de Clare, his bedfellow Henry de Montfort, and Robert de Ross. Under the pretence of testing their respective steeds, Edward kept his attendants riding races till their horses were exhausted. A little before sunset a horseman on a grey charger appeared on Tillington Hill and waved his cap. The Prince caught the signal, and setting spurs to his horse, an animal provided by his friends, galloped off with De Clare and five other men who were in the secret. He joined Roger Mortimer, who was waiting for him in a neighbouring wood. One can almost picture his escape on horseback, and the secret joy of the monks, one of whom had previously conveyed the messages necessary to ensure so successful a result. This, and other benefits received, induced him to select those monks as the object of his promised munificence. In considering this point, it should, however, be remembered that the Prince was married to Queen Eleanor in a Cistercian Monastery in Castile in Spain, that his vow was to the Virgin, and that all Cistercian Monasteries were founded and dedicated to the memory of the Queen of Heaven and Earth, Holy Mary. Accordingly, in 1266 or later, he commenced to build and provide an Abbey at Dernhale (now Darnhall), in Cheshire, (the ancestral seat of the Verdin family) and, subsequently on the 14th January, 1273, a colony of Cistercian Monks from Doré in Herefordshire arrived there, but finding Vale Royal "a more pleasant situation," it was

decided to erect the Abbey there. In the latter part of July, 1277, King Edward was on his way from Worcester to Chester with a view of subduing Llewellyn Prince of Wales, who had refused to recognise the King's sovereignty. On his journey north he called at Dernhale to see his old friends the Monks of Doré, and afterwards at Vale Royal to lay the foundation stone. Many of the Barons and nobility, who were assisting him in the subjugation of Llewellyn, were present at the great religious ceremony. Amongst these was Gilbert de Clare Earl of Gloucester, formerly the closest ally of Simon de Montfort but afterwards his bitterest rival, who later still became the King's son-in-law by marriage with the King's daughter Joan of Acre, so-called because she was born in the Holy Land. The King's Cousin, Edmund Earl of Cornwall, who subsequently acted as regent whilst King Edward was in Gascony, was present, as also William Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, who on the 16th November, 1276, was authorised to take command at Chester; Maurice de Croun, Otto de Grandison, who in the Welsh war took command of the Anglesey Division and subsequently was one of the Commissioners to arrange terms of peace with the Welsh Prince; Robert Tiptoft, another Peace Commissioner and subsequently in command of the Army in South Wales. All these noblemen and warriors laid stones, after the King had laid the first on the site of the High Altar, "in honour of Christ, the Virgin Mary, the Holy Confessors, St. Nicholas and St. Nicasius the Bishops." Queen Eleanor of Castile, the wife of King Edward, also laid two stones, one for herself and the other for her son Alphonso. He is not likely to have been present, as he would only then be four years of age, having been born at Bayonne in 1273.

He was the only living child of the marriage, but unfortunately he died in 1284, otherwise he would have ascended the throne and England would have had a King Alphonso instead of a King Edward II. Thus the name Alphonso might have become as common in the British Isles as it is in Spain, the native country of his beautiful and beloved mother. Robert Burnell, the Bishop of Bath and Wells and Chancellor of England, the son of a Shropshire squire, was present, and joined Anian the Second, Bishop of St. Asaph, in the celebration of High Mass. Burnell had accompanied the King when he was Prince and Crusader in the Holy Land; he had only been promoted to his high office three years previously, but for fifteen years after being at Vale Royal he held the office of Chancellor of England, and possessed the chief place in Edward's counsels. The King must have been desirous of arriving speedily in Wales, for the site had to be consecrated by the Bishop of St. Asaph (the King's Father Confessor in the Holy Land) several days before the foundation stones had been laid. Even that seemed an unnecessary proceeding, for the sweet spot, according to general belief, had already received a higher and superior form of consecration. For ages before the building of the Monastery, on the Festival of the Virgin (again associating the reason for the selection of the site with the Holy Mother), amid the solitude which reigned there, the shepherds had heard music, and celestial voices, and had seen occasionally radiance that changed the darkness into day. It was maintained that old people, who lived to see the building of the fabric, had seen the holy pile, from turret to foundation stone, glittering in the night with a miraculous illumination visible to the rest of the country at a surprising distance. Prior to the great stone

laying, and for four years afterwards (until the year 1281), the monks travelled daily backwards and forwards between Dernhall and Vale Royal. Even after that, they had to live in "mean and strait lodgings," temporary wooden erections, until the great Abbey and most of its offices were opened in 1330, and even then it was not finally completed until 1350. Seventy-three years passed away—as also the King himself, and his son and successor Edward II.—between that memorable and royal visit and the last sound of the mallet and the chisel. One can, therefore, understand what a magnificent building was erected, surpassing, in size, as we now know, the historical ruins of the Abbeys of Fountains, Tintern and Furness, left to us as reminders of the great Cistercian architects and builders who consecrated, not only each stone with its mason's mark, but also each cut of the chisel, with a deep love, full of religious zeal and fervour.

The Monks of the Cistercian Order, who came to take up their abode at Vale Royal, were generally known as the White Monks, because of the white dress they adopted as a symbol of purity. The Cistercian Order was derived from, and was an offshoot of a community of Benedictine Monks (often called the Black Monks because of the colour of their dress) who were established at Molesme in France under that excellent Superior, St. Robert, he having under him St. Alberic as his Prior. St. Alberic was a man of learning, well skilled in things both human and divine; a lover of the Benedictine rule and of the brethren. When St. Robert left Molesme in disgust at the irregular conduct of his religious associates, he entrusted his authority to his prior, St. Alberic, who vigorously applied himself to the restoration of rigid discipline. His efforts were fruitless;

his brethren were deaf to his salutary corrections; they broke out into open rebellion, heaped upon him abusive language, and ultimately cast him into a dungeon. St. Alberic was ready to lay down his life for his brethren, but seeing that they repaid his love with hatred, he thought it best, on his release, to withdraw from the storm, and allow it to pass over. Alberic ultimately returned to his brethren at Molesme, at the command of his Bishop, and afterwards, in or about the year 1098, concluded a successful arrangement for a final departure of the order from Molesme, to seek a breathing place for their fervour in the deserts of Citeaux, also in France. It was from the name of this secluded spot we receive the designation of the order Cistercian. St. Alberic joined his brethren in their manual labours, and boldly marched on before them in all the austerities of their sublime state. They had no other provision for their travels than the vestments and sacred vessels for the celebration of the Holy Mysteries, and a large breviary for the due performance of the high office. To prevent misapprehension it should be stated that their complaint was that the strict rules of St. Benedict were not fully observed by their Benedictine brethren, some of whom they had left at Molesme. Some of the relaxations they complained of, were as follows:—

- (1.) Novices were sometimes admitted to full profession before the expiration of their year's novitiate, contrary to Chapter 58 of St. Benedict's rule.
- (2.) Some of the religious (as distinguished from conversi or converts, or lay brethren) made use of skins and furs in their clothing for the purposes of warmth, contrary to Chapter 55.

- (3.) The regular fast was dispensed with on certain days and particular festivals, contrary to Chapter 41.
- (4.) Strangers were not welcomed with the salutation ordained in Chapter 53.
- (5.) Those of their brethren at Molesme who said the divine office in private, did not say it upon their knees, as appointed by Chapter 50.
- (6.) The junior brethren in passing before their seniors did not ask their benediction, according to Chapter 63.
- (7.) Abbots had adopted the practice of receiving indifferently all religious, who presented themselves, without the consent of their proper superiors, and without letters of recommendation, contrary to Chapter 61.
- (8.) Benedictines were engaged in many employments contrary to the spirit and profession of a recluse life.

It seems wise to mention these complaints so that we may know that no complaints of an immoral character were made, and may also judge of the austere yet religious characters of St. Robert and St. Alberic, the founders of the order of Reformed Benedictines to be thenceforth called Cistercians, and those who were associated with them. Whilst at work with his hands, that the spirit might not wander into the regions of forbidden or idle thought, St. Alberic would frequently take the psalter, and pour forth his soul in fervent strains of prayer to Heaven. When all the brethren had retired to repose, which was exceedingly sweet after a day of hard labour and long fasting, he, unmindful of his advanced years, spent the greater part of the night in works of penance. He took



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A Choir Religious of the Cistercian
Order in his Cowl.

rest barely sufficient for the support of nature, and this upon naked boards. Long before the brethren rose to their Mattins, he was again busy with his psalter. Indeed, the difficulties of his position rendered the divine assistance, which he obtained through prayer, necessary for his consolation and management. However, perseverance and patience conquered and brought success. With the approbation of Rome, St. Alberic drew up, with the consent of his community, several ordinances for the better observance of St. Benedict's rule, but with some important changes. One change was that of the colour of the dress worn by the Order. He substituted white for the dark brown or black of the Benedictines. The reason assigned for the change of colour in the habit, was, devotion to St. Mary, observable in the Order from the beginning. It was a standing law that all Cistercian monasteries should be founded and dedicated to the memory of the Holy Maiden Mother. The immediate cause of the adoption of the white habit is mysterious; it seems difficult to give a satisfactory reason as to why the change should be made, without the sanction of any statute of the Order, especially as it was opposed to the custom, if not to the rule, of the primitive Benedictines. A tradition is even current in the Order, that St. Alberic saw the Blessed Virgin in a vision putting upon his shoulders the white garment; and that he changed the tawny colour of St. Mary Magadene to the joyful colour sacred to the Mother of our Lord, in consequence of the consolation which the vision afforded him in the difficulties with which he was then struggling. The one thing certain is, that the white garment was assumed in honour of the purity of St. Mary, the special patroness of the Cistercians. She was the spotless lily of the valley, in which the King

of Heaven deigned to take up His abode, and the Cistercians thought it well that she should protect, by her prayers, their lowly houses, which were hidden from the world in secluded vales, and make them also the dwelling-place of her Son. The Black Monks or Benedictines reproached the Cistercians with wearing a garment fit only for a time of joy, while the monastic state was one of penitence, but the White Monks answered that the life of a monk was not only one of penitence, but was like that of the angels, and therefore they wore white garments to show the spiritual joy of their hearts. And, notwithstanding their coarse bread and hard beds, there was a cheerfulness about the Cistercians which may in a great measure be traced to what we should now call a sympathy with nature. In fact, in some small degree the Cistercians were the Nonconformists of the decadent yet powerful order of the Benedictines. Have we not still disputes over the black gown and the white gown ; do we not now expect all our clergy and ministers to wear black cloth, and would there not be a scene if either or any of them appeared in the pew or the pulpit in a white suit of clothes ? Yet we have the Japanese appearing in white on the occasion of the funeral of their relatives, expressing not only by their garments, but by their smiles, the joy which we should entertain, but do not emphasize, namely, our belief that our deceased friends have gone to a better home. Indeed we are all Benedictines in our Sunday dress to-day, putting on a black coat to attend church.

It is with this historical explanation we return to the Cistercians, now busy in the building of their new monastery at Vale Royal, and in this connection it may be interesting to inquire why that particular site was selected



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A Choir Religious of the Cistercian
Order in his working habit.

and what rules would govern them in the class of building to be erected. The Order was originally the most severe in Christendom. The Cistercians have been aptly termed "the sour Puritans of the cloister." At the foundation of the Order the following rules respecting abbey buildings had to be strictly observed :—

"None of our houses are to be built in cities, in castles, or villages ; but in places remote from the conversation of men, and let all churches of our Order be dedicated and founded in honour of the Blessed Mary."

"Let there be no towers of stone for bells nor of wood to an immoderate height, which are unsuited to the simplicity of the Order."

"Let glass windows be white only."

"Suitable and notable curiosities in carvings, paintings, buildings, pavements and other like things which may corrupt the early purity of the Order, and are not consistent with our poverty, we forbid to be made in abbeys, granges, and cellarer's buildings ; nor any paintings except the image of our Saviour. Tables, too, that appertain to the altars may only be painted in one colour. All these things let Father Abbots in their visitations carefully inquire about and cause to be observed."

"To the grandeur of Cluniac foundations the Cistercian buildings were the strongest contrast and a silent rebuke. There were no splendours in their original institutions : everywhere an austere simplicity—a Puritan plainness : for costly tapestries, naked walls ; for heaven-aspiring roofs, low rafters ; for immense windows with their gorgeous wealth of stained-glass, narrow openings just sufficient to let in the day ; for silver candelabra, iron candlesticks ; no splendid ritual, no elaborate music. But the rigour of the

Cistercians themselves was, in due time, to thaw beneath the sun of the world's favour," and in the thirteenth century, when Vale Royal was founded, modifications in style of architecture and conduct of daily life had crept in gradually—slowly, but surely. Goethe, recording the attempts to spoil him which followed his first literary success, has somewhere said, "When a man has done a notable thing, the world takes excellent care that he shall never do another." This cruel truth is applicable to societies as well as to individuals. After a while prosperity did its work. The salt lost its savour, and its first true love departed. Fuller has put it: "As Mercers, when their old stuffs begin to tire in sale, refresh them in new names, to make them more vendable; so when the Benedictines waxed stale, first the Cluniacs, next the Cistercians, re-dressed the drowsy Benedictines."

Hence it is most important to give the date of the foundation of Vale Royal and to compare its age with the life history of the Cistercian Order before we can picture its architecture, its exterior plan and its inner life.

Although Vale Royal Abbey was founded so far back as 1277, it was with one exception (Buckland, in Devonshire), the youngest daughter of the Cistercian Order in this country of the Pre-Reformation type. The first Cistercian Abbey in England was founded in 1129 at Waverley, in Surrey, and, therefore, has been styled the Mother Church. Then followed Tintern in 1131, Rievaulx in 1132, Byland and Furness in 1134, Melrose 1136, Newminster 1138, Kingswood 1139, and Fountains in or about 1140. The Order made such rapid progress during its early years that in 1151, as many as five hundred houses had been founded in Europe and Great Britain. The general Chapter ruled

that no others should be established, nevertheless by the middle of the thirteenth century the number had increased to no fewer than one thousand eight hundred. In England and Wales there were seventy-six houses. In fact, Abbot Gasquet in his "English Monastic Life," published in 1904, gives a list of one hundred and eight Cistercian Abbeys in Great Britain, of which thirty-five then presented considerable remains, thirty-eight had interesting ruins, and of thirty-five no remains could then be seen. Even Vale Royal is one of the Abbeys founded one hundred and twenty-five years after the prohibitory order was issued. These dates are all interesting, because, as time progressed, the style of architecture adopted, and the life led by the monks varied with the age and surroundings. Indeed, Vale Royal was conceived in the last century of what is generally termed the Middle Ages, and attained its majority and manhood in the period best known as the Renaissance or re-birth. "This latter metaphor may be taken to signify the entrance of the European nations upon a fresh stage of vital energy, in general implying a fuller consciousness and a freer exercise of faculties than had belonged to the mediæval period. We must not imagine that there was any abrupt break with the Middle Ages. On the contrary, the Renaissance was rather the last stage of the Middle Ages emerging from ecclesiastical and feudal despotism, developing what was original in mediæval ideas by the light of classic arts and letters, holding in itself the promise of the modern world. It was therefore a period and a process of transition, fusion, preparation and tentative endeavour." You have the same process going on, gradually, in our present day life, both in the Church of England and the Nonconformist sections of the com-

munity, as well as in public and Parliamentary life. In the former, surpliced choirs have been introduced, in some Mass vestments worn, free seats instead of old fashioned square pews, tall pointed spires instead of square castellated steeples; whilst in questions of policy, abolition of Church rates has been secured, as also the representation of local authorities in the management of what were popularly termed "Church schools." In Nonconformist circles you see fine architecture and pealing organs have taken the place of the primitive abode and "the singers" of a former age—concert halls and meeting-places costing thousands of pounds are erected; yet with all these changes the Parish Church and City Road Chapel continue to exist, and receive the respect and veneration they rightly deserve. Notwithstanding its comparative youth, the historical associations connected with the old Abbey of Vale Royal, its abbots and monks, are extremely interesting. On the ground to-day one can easily picture the quaint white monks of olden days, both religious and secular or lay brethren, busily engaged in agricultural pursuits on the undulating mounds, which are still to be seen. The Abbey itself was built as directed by the rules of the Order on somewhat low ground, thus signifying humility; it was erected in a secluded spot, even a distance away from the small villages of Over and Weaverham, then known as the words are now pronounced by the unlettered of to-day, as Ouvere and Wareham; also in contradistinction to the Benedictine Abbey at Chester right in the centre of the busy city. Even now it is one of the most lovely spots in Cheshire, though somewhat shadowed by the well-known six sisters, which rear their heads and send their salt works' smoke towards Heaven, which was



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A Lay Brother of the Cistercian Order
in his working habit.

more plaintively touched by the Gregorian chants of six centuries ago.

A fine avenue of beech trees yet shades the approach from the Abbey gates to the place where the Monastery stood, and although little if any trace of the old Abbey buildings is now to be seen, a glimpse of the Abbey Leger, with its record of monastic life and discipline, helps us to sketch with vivid imagination many of the details which are now mere matters of history. On the survey map, before referred to, may still be noticed references to "The Monks' Well" and the "Abbot's Walk" (now bearing the rustic name of "Mill Lane"); but a little to the north-east of the present mansion we still find on the map, printed in old Roman letters, these striking words: "The Nun's Grave."

What a world of thought this simple title brings to one's mind! For the old Abbey, its proud and despotic governors, its royal founder, with all the wealth of manuscript and money are gone; leaving this bare record of the past, "The Nun's Grave." Even the old Abbey Leger seems to be lost and only one copy remains. The books which Henry III., the father of King Edward, collected for the monks from all the Abbots and Priors throughout the kingdom have disappeared, the endowment of over £500 a year (of the money value of £10,000 to-day) has been confiscated, and only a few—very few in number—of the stones of the building remain which, although boasting of architecture and workmanship not even now surpassed, is almost without a link which connects us with that grand past we have had to pass over so quickly.

We can walk with reverential air over the ground trodden by those hardworking Cistercians. We can picture

the assemblage of Lords spiritual and temporal present to support the King, Edward the First, when he laid that sacred stone. We can see him taking from round his neck that bit of the Holy Cross he had brought back on his return from the Crusades. We picture him depositing the Holy relic in the cavity of the great stone. We even now listen intently for the clang of the Baron's armour, mingled as it must have been with the Gregorian chants of the Bishops in their flowing robes. We can picture the fine figure of His Majesty, the Justinian of England, then in the prime of life at the age of thirty-eight, full of vigour, accustomed to ride some thirty miles on horseback each day of the year. We can see his elegant form and majestic stature, so tall that few of his own people reached his shoulder. The length of his arm is even the foundation of our yard measure of to-day. His ample forehead and prominent chest added to the dignity of his personal appearance. He was most agile in the use of the sword, and his length of limb not only was the cause of his being named "Longshanks," but gave him a firm seat on the most spirited horse. His hair was light before he went to the East as a Crusader to fight for the Cross, but it became dark in middle life. When animated he was passionately eloquent. He has been aptly termed the greatest of the Plantagenets. We see there, too, the Spanish beauty, Queen Eleanor, married when she was ten and her bridegroom fifteen, afterwards educated in France, forsaking the pleasures of a royal life, and accompanying her lord through all his dangers in the Holy Land, so much so that she was surnamed "The Faithful." Fearless of danger, she answered his dissasions by saying, "The way to Heaven is as near from Palestine as from

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St. Catherine of Alexandria, on one side of
the Cross placed above the Ann's Grave.

England." To our nation she was a loving mother, the column and pillar of the whole realm. She was a godly, modest, and merciful Queen. The English nation in her time was not harassed by foreigners, nor the country people by the surveyors of the Crown. The sorrow-stricken she consoled, as became her dignity, and she made friends those who were at discord. In her, we are told, "strife ever found a peacemaker, the oppressed protection, and the distressed sympathy." To his friend the Abbot of Cluny, King Edward writes: "In life I loved her dearly, nor can I cease to love her in death." Every time Charing Cross is mentioned a loving tribute is paid to her memory, for Edward, speaking in French, called her "*chère reine*" ("dear queen"), and on that spot he erected a cross where her body rested on its way to Westminster Abbey. Thus the words "Charing Cross" (a corruption of *chère reine*) signify "The Dear Queen's Cross." With so great a founder, and with so splendid a Queen, we can well imagine with how much love and prayer each stone of the great building was cut, chiselled and laid—how fine was the delicate tracery of the magnificent mullioned windows; with the most durable timber was each canopied stall carved—all, all, as it was then, for the love of God, to endure for ever and ever!

To-day "The Nun's Grave" remains alone; a single silent pedestal of the mystery which surrounds the spot, once full of a religious life, now venerated by the lapse of ages. Visit the Nun's Grave yourself, and there you will find it placed in a sweet corner, north-east of the beautiful grassy lawn overlooking the broad but pretty valley of the Weaver, traversed as it is to-day by salt-laden vessels from the neighbouring town of Winsford. Right in the centre

of a circle of grand old elms stands a weather-beaten pedestal of red stone, some eight feet high, surmounted by a square-shaped piece of hard grey granite or limestone, on which are carved illustrations of religious subjects, one representing the Crucifixion with the two Marys at the foot of the Cross; another figure is St. Catherine of Alexandria with her Sword and Wheel (and from the latter of which to-day we get our firework of that name); a third is the Virgin Mother and Child; whilst the fourth is Saint Nicholas, one of the patron saints of the Abbey, holding as his emblem three purses on a book. St. Nicholas was the protector and patron saint of children, and in that capacity is best remembered as Santa Claus. The sandstone pedestal rests upon a base of finely carved stones, once forming the massive resting-place of one of the great pillars of the pile which only exists in name. The whole can be readily seen from the windows of the library at Vale Royal, and round which are placed folio editions of many valuable works of antiquity. If the stones covering the Nun's Grave had been minutely examined many years ago there could, with great care, have been noticed a very small inscription—one word only—in Roman letters: "IDA." It is illegible now, yet the remembrance of it brings back to memory a story full of pathos and tenderness. Who could but wonder what "IDA" meant? Did it speak of gentle love or bitter hate? Was it cut and carved by some meddling interloper, or was it intended to designate someone who really lived and loved, and who, with heavy heart, had been carried to a last resting-place

"so sweet

That Angels we might meet" ?

Why was this spot selected for Ida—a nun—within the



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One side of Cross erected above Ann's
Grave, containing a statue of St. Nicholas,
one of the Patron Saints to whom Vale
Royal Monastery was dedicated.

precincts of a monastery for the celibate White Monks? Who was she; where was she born; where did she live, and with what religious order was she associated? These and many other similar thoughts crowd into one's mind. The pretty picture of the Nun's Grave might have remained shrouded in mysterious lore, had not a former noble owner permitted access to the valuable literary treasures then lying unnoticed in one of the old rooms of the present Hall. The books and manuscripts there had evidently not been touched or opened for many years, and the accumulation of dust and cobwebs rendered it most desirable that they should be carefully cleaned, and afterwards catalogued. Whilst engaged in this pleasant occupation a small quarto-sized manuscript was picked up. It was certainly in the handwriting of a lady, and, having regard to its age and the little care bestowed upon its custody, was in fairly good condition. The boarded backs, covered with stamped Cordova leather, the brown coloured leaves, all denoted considerable age. Written upon the first page were the words—

“SWEETE REMEMBRAUNCES

OF

IDA MARIAN GODMAN,

YE NUN OF ST. MARY'S CONVENT,


CESTR.”

The whole story was very long, too long to be written out in full; to a large extent it must therefore be epitomized. From it, however, might be gathered, that Ida was the sweet loving child of parents of the yeoman class, residing originally near Merton Common, Surrey, but that, about the 13th century, they had removed with their family to

Gouldbourne, and afterwards to Kingsley near Frodsham and Norton Priory in Cheshire. The Godman family were no doubt associated for many years with the county of Chester, as also with the city, as all our historians testify. Not much is related of her father, except that he allowed himself to be too easily and readily influenced by inferiors, who took advantage of him for their own benefit. He was, however, a man of considerable education and intelligence, ready at all times to rectify a wrong, and atone for any injury unwittingly committed. Her mother's name was Emeline, and she came from a family named Luxmore. She was the type of an Englishwoman of those times, frugal, most industrious and hard-working, full of courage, sufficient to overcome great difficulties, priding herself on the beautiful clean home in which they lived ; it was always her pleasure, as also her duty, to make the open hearth fire, with its bright, burning logs, a centre of attraction and comfort, and, notwithstanding the long cold winters (often spent alone with her children) isolated from their neighbours for days together, day quickly succeeded day, and each night she had some pleasant reminiscence to recount, which would be followed by a sweet smile or a hearty laugh all round. Ida was their darling child, tall and handsome ; her winsome face, ruddy and fresh, with cheeks like a sunburnt peach, lips red as poppy flowers, with dark flashing eyes and rich brown hair ; she was always a picture of which they were proud. She was gentle and loving : how the tears would run from those dark eyes, if she should chance to hear of anyone sick or in distress, and yet withal she was brave and noble, not wanting in courage if occasion needed. Once, when the lambs were skipping on the hill sides of Overton, one of their number

had strayed away, and was missing for several days. Ida took her share in the search, and though there was danger for a little child of tender years to be far from home after sunset, she could not sleep until every effort to effect its rescue had been made. She alone was successful, and at great risk brought up the lost lamb from the bottom of an old quarry, where by some means it had wandered. Her heart beat with joy to think that she had been of some assistance, and had rescued one of her little playmates from certain death.

Her lines were without shadows, the unchequered joy of life was now having its full fling of happiness, and all the grace of youth was disporting in the beams of a seemingly perpetual sunlight.

 You enter the Cathedral Church of an old Benedictine Abbey, and, through the rich colours of the Gothic windows streams the radiance of a noonday sun. How these gleams light up many otherwise dark and sombre nooks and corners, though still leaving a light and shade, which render the gloom less hateful, and the varied hues of colour more sacred and beautiful! Hush! A sweet sound rises in plaintive accent, filling the air with a pleasing tremor; now it is followed by the harsher stops of the organ, then a crash of power and fulness, to be succeeded again by that soft stealing sound which almost stays one's breath and fills the soul with sweetest joy. Will the life of Ida—dear Ida!—be one of soft sweet melody, or will it be mingled with the austerities of life and passion? Will the mellowness of years be accompanied with all that life and happiness can give, or will the years grow more grizzly, grey and cold? We shall see.

CHAPTER II.

BROTHER JOHN OF NORTON PRIORY.

“The walls have voices and the stones do speak,
It is the very House of Memory.”

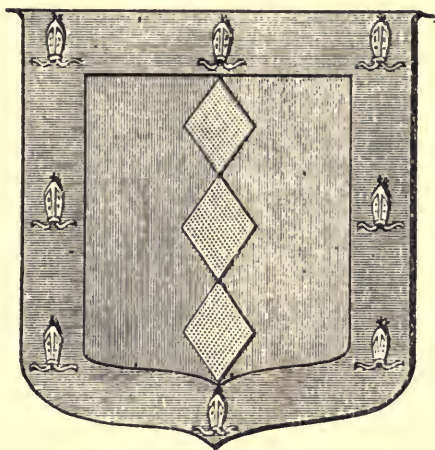
“BROTHER John, do thou go down to Norton Brook and see what fish can be caught to-day to replenish the Priory fish tanks. I have just heard by special messenger that His Majesty the King, Edward II., God bless him! is near, and may call at the Priory for that food and sustenance which with us is open to all, both rich and poor.”

Addressing the Prior, he replied, “Father, thy wishes shall be most earnestly and zealously attended to, and if His Majesty shall vouchsafe to call and see us poor brethren, he may be assured not only of the best in Norton Brook, but of that welcome which we, his subjects, shall be pleased to give.”

To this the Prior replied, “So be it.”

Norton Priory is delightfully situated in Cheshire, near the valley of the Weaver some fifteen or sixteen miles North from Vale Royal, and is near to what is now the manufacturing town of Runcorn. The brethren of the House of Norton were Canons Regular of the Order of St. Augustine, generally styled “Austin Canons”; they wore a white tunic with a linen gown under a black cloak and a hood which covered the neck and shoulders, while they wore on the head a five-pointed cap. From the Priory windows could be seen the green woods of Overton

Hills, where deer and game were abundant, and just on the other side of the hill was Ida's home. No wonder, therefore, that she was accustomed to walk to the Priory on many occasions when it was necessary to take



ARMS OF NORTON PRIORY.

[Taken from Tanner's "Notitia Monastica."]

provisions for the monks, and thus her gentle disposition was well known to those who, in that neighbourhood, were wont to give the slight instruction which the times and place afforded.

Brother John was the most popular of his Order, not bound up with dogmatic ideas, but accepting his sacred office in the liberal light of a desire to do whatever duty was imposed upon him, with a warm heart and willing hand. Often, both in the day and night, the poor around would receive his friendly counsel, and to him would appeal for help in case of difficulty. No sickness or distress arose but his ministrations were first sought after and never refused.

The rules of the Augustinian Canons in this respect differed from those of the Cistercian Order. The monks of the latter were cloister bound, whereas the canons were permitted and did undertake a certain amount of parish work. The material resources of the Priory were often requisitioned by John in aid of his own personal labour. No wonder, therefore, that this beam of sunshine shone in many homes.

The news that the King was near came as a surprise, and some wondered whether the visit was to be the occasion of investigation and change, or if the King should be calling in a friendly way in passing through the country. It soon spread, and many preparations were undertaken to make the visit a success, and also enjoyable to his Majesty.

It was with a light heart that Brother John set out on his fishing expedition, and, having procured bait or fly, which he thought would be inviting, proceeded through the meadows to the brook side. Here he skilfully threw his line, and, with special piscatorial knowledge, would lie full length on the bank of the stream and plunge his arm, shoulder deep, in the cold water, his fingers moving gently under the belly of some great trout that lay all unsuspecting of his danger, with his head pointed up stream ; nor was he long before he had partially filled the great basket at his side with beautiful trout. Presently he was startled by the singing of a young voice, which came from the direction of the lowland, a little higher up the stream. Soon the singer came tripping along with a frolicsome and cheerful air, but noticing the monk she stopped and was about to turn away, but he beckoned the youthful maiden to him. Soon he saw who it was, and said, " Ida, what bringeth thee here ? "

"Oh, Father, I wist not that you were near, and if my singing hath disturbed thee, be pleased to accept the excuse I make and trouble me no more."

He replied lovingly, "Thy singing trouble me! My child, I am humbly sorry thou didst not continue, for a more beautiful voice, so full of rich, clear tones, I have not heard for many a day."

Sweetly she said, "Oh, Father, I only sing from the heart, just as I feel, and if what little thou hast heard has pleased thee, I am well content. I feared, however, that I might have interfered with thee in thy duty, and they say the King is coming, and large supplies are required at the Priory."

"True, my dear child, the King may come. Hast thou ever seen a King?"

"No; I would thou wouldst tell me of him."

"Ida, I am not concerned so much for the King of England, though my respects and loyalty to him. He is a great man, and will probably bring a large following with him. He has great power which he may use for weal or woe. I shall do my humble duty by him. Ida, hast thou never heard of another King who loves us all—you and me—and is full of compassion and tender mercy?"

Ida looked at the monk with her bright eye and whispered, "Oh, Father, tell me of him. Is he the King whose name is written in the chained Book at the Priory?"

Affectionately and lovingly Father John answered, "Ida, thou hast guessed rightly, and I would thou shouldst know more of Him. If I call and see thee at thy house and tell thee of Him, wilt thou try to love Him too?"

Tenderly she said, "Father, if it be right, I will do as

thou wishest, for if He has made thee so good He must be a King to love for ever and ever."

Then he took her delicate, white hand, and placed it in his own and said, "Now tell me, why hast thou come here, and how didst thou cross the hills; was it alone or did anyone come with thee?"

With spirit she replied, "Father John, I came alone, for I am not afraid, and I like to see the walls of the Priory, and peep over into the garden, and then I came to the brookside just to wander home again."

By this time the basket was full of fish and the monk was about to say good-bye, when Ida said, "May I come and see the King?" to which he replied, "Which King dost thou mean?" Ida answered, "The King of England." "Ida, thou shalt see the King of England, but if thou wilt I would thou also be prepared to see the King of Heaven. Wilt thou try to wear that apparel which would fit thee for such an audience?"

With head bent down and the struggle of a tear she said "I will try Father, if thou wilt help me."

The simple words of the maiden of twenty-one summers pierced the tender heart of the monk, and, contrary to monastic regulations, placing a kiss on her forehead he told her he would always be ready to assist and guide her. They walked side by side until she slipped quietly away, but not before he had gently pressed the hand which was near him, repressing feelings which, whether or no, right or wrong, disturbed his usually quiet breast. Slowly he returned to the Priory, meditating over the picture still visibly impressed upon his mind, and listening to the echo of the gentle voice which yet filled his soul with joy. The King was nought now, for had he not seen and talked with a

veritable Queen? A few moments later he tried to stifle the grosser thoughts of his nature and sharply called himself to account by the remembrance of his holy calling and the vows of office. Sharper still came the piercing voice of the Priory porter, West: "Brother John, why dost thou look on Norton grounds as though searching for gold? There bain't as much of that stuff here as would cover a silver mark. What luck with thy fishing? There be more value in a well-fed two-pound trout than the gold tinsel on all the King's equerries put together, for thou canst eat one, but the other—phew!"

John passed quietly by, not deigning to notice this uncouth remark—one so utterly at variance with the thoughts uppermost in his mind. He slowly bowed his head on passing the stone-cut statue of St. Christopher bearing on his shoulders the child Christ. He stayed and looked until the dead stone seemed invested with life. The innocence and sweetness of youth, full of careless smile, shining from beneath clusters of locks of hair, all radiant on the shoulders of a strong, heroic man, seemed to suggest a dream—an idea—which, in all his studies, had never occurred to him before: St. Christopher and Christ—Brother John and Ida.

CHAPTER III.

A DREAM: THE PICTURE LAND OF SLEEP.

“In my Father’s house are many mansions.”

THE dream of a peasant may be as imaginative and apparently as real, and in form, colour and outline as artistic, as the dream of a prince. Both, on mental wings, may be carried with a flash of the mind, quick as lightning shaft, to the dens of poverty or the haunts of pleasure. Each may see the picture of Heaven opened, and stand with reverence before the Great White Throne, or feel the burning thirst of a hell they have never entered.

Ida was tired, so she quickly fell asleep on the dry rushen bed, which in her little room of wattles and boards was to her the symposium of peace and happiness. There she lay, the very picture of loveliness and contentment—the body, not only absolutely and unconsciously resting, but shut in within itself; the life, not weary with the burden of sight; the ear, not disturbed with the faintest of whispers: motionless—heedless either of the mother’s kiss or the marauder’s murderous look. See, however, she smiles: why is it so? She speaks not, she sleeps on, the dimple returns and the sweetness of Heaven seems to shine: aye, then a change—a scared and frightened feature; the mind disturbed, upsets the balance between sleep and rest; the body awakens only to discover its palaces all in air, bright dreams lighted by a sun which

never shone. Ida had been dreaming; she saw a great, white cloud with round, overlapping edges, emblazoned and tipped with bright golden rays of brilliant hue—not the coloured cardboard clouds of transformation scenes with painted trees and limelight moon, but the most lovely sunset you could ever see, with lines of gold, tinged with the most brilliant red. From out of the cloud, she saw a beautifully shaped hand pushed right through. It seemed exactly like a living hand, for the flesh tint was easily distinguished from the surrounding light and colour; the upper portion about the wrist was covered with white linen of the finest texture, bound by a crimson band. The fingers seemed to move in a sweetly inviting manner, not once or twice, but several times in slow succession; presently, the whole hand was opened, and in the palm itself was a deep red wound, piercing right through the delicate flesh, leaving serrated and bruised edges, still bleeding freely. A voice in sweetest tone whispers, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” How that plaintive “Come,” so often repeated, seemed to mean a real “Come,” and to beckon the sleeping maiden away from the tiny bed, extended upon the clean floor, to somewhere beyond the clouds. Still she sleeps—sleeps with a smile, the seeming reflection of light which shone before the sun, and so dazzling as to shadow its brightest rays. Slowly, but mentally, she responds to the invitation, and following the guiding hand passes beyond the veil of cloud, and through the surrounding halo of glory. On the other side is a bright figure dressed in pure white with long flowing chestnut hair—a shining countenance, and fair to look upon. Ida felt she did not walk or run, but seemed to glide without motion or exertion; she knew she did not

breathe, yet she lived. The white figure at last stopped at a great door which glistened as though covered with lustrous diamonds; before the door opened, she exchanged her coarse clothing for an exquisitely rainbow-tinted silken covering, which she subsequently discovered looked a pure white when moving along. The door opened, and she and her Guide passed through—the door was shut. The inner side was red with rubies which could be seen hundreds of miles away. The Guide addressed her: “Ida, thy loving work on earth and thy example of true simplicity and honest truth have led Me to bring thee hither, so that when thou returnest, the world may be better for thy life.” She bowed, and the Guide proceeded: “The mansions which thou seest are not prepared for the rich, the noble, the poor, or even the religious; but for those who in My Name with all simplicity and truth have shared their lot and made brighter and happier the lives of those round about them. Here we note not the gifts, but the giver; for even a cup of cold water shared with some poor way-faring and tired brother is sweeter to him and dearer to us than the gorgeous apparel of Cathedral priestcraft. He who binds up with his own linen the wounds of the attacked traveller, the tired, bleeding, yet sincere penitent, or like thee has nursed and tended the poor and sick, is welcome, and you who have spoken kind gentle words to the weary and distressed, and taught others to lisp, however feebly, the Honour of My Father’s Name shall find an eternal home within these City walls.”

The tears struggled down poor Ida’s cheeks, for although she had heard or read that “sorrow or sighing should not enter there,” these were the tears of joy—a heart full—so full of tender sympathy, that the very gentleness of the

voice she heard brought forth a silent eloquence stronger and more touching than any words. On and on they wandered, listening to the sweet strains of choirs of angels, the air filled with the delicious scent of the loveliest roses and sweet smelling flowers.

Now they entered a great court which enclosed a green sward, composed of softest moss, each diminutive spray glistening with dew, which, as it moved slightly to and fro, presented beautiful varied colours of emerald green and ruby red. In the centre, and surrounded by a septagonal basin of the purest crystal, was a fountain of radiating light and colour, which cast reflecting hues upon the peculiar shaped buildings which enclosed the court. Here and there were groups of quaintly-clothed inhabitants; their head-gear was largely composed of brilliant feathers which contrasted most strikingly with the dark stained colour of their faces; their bodies were covered with long flowing robes encircled with a band, containing twelve different jewels. They seemed to use these in a most strange manner, for each stone was different. Simply by touching one they could fly from place to place, another would bring before them the face of a friend with whom conversation seemed to be sweet; a third stone seemed to be applied for the purpose of rest and sleep; one stone in the centre was much larger than the others, and, apparently contained the image of a Face which shone with dazzling lustre, and it was to this they always turned when seemingly in doubt or difficulty.

"These," said the Guide, "are those who lived on your earth thousands of years ago, and whom your great men term savages; they never, like you, heard of the sweetness and power of My Word, they lived as their fathers had

done, and although they did not, what your religious men term 'many mighty things,' they were not conscious that their works were wrong; indeed, many practices which are now called and esteemed wicked were done by them 'for righteousness sake,' and so My Father placed them in one of His mansions where, under the guidance and teaching they are now receiving, they will soon prepare themselves for reception in My Father's Court, where they alone who know and love Him are welcomed and accepted."

The look of surprise and astonishment on Ida's face led the Guide to make this further remark:—"The words I spoke on earth were simple and true, but your so-called clever and religious men have sported their lives away and the good they might have done, by reading and writing of doctrinal differences which have disfigured and distorted the simple Christian's Christ. The words of a little child spoken with so much gentle love and truth, the good deeds of the loving Sisters and Nurses of the earth, are far more acceptable in Heaven than all the learned disquisitions and disputations which religious men have devised: these we can see are often written, not to illustrate Heaven and our Father in the most noble aspect, but to parade the self-esteemed ability and opinions of those who value the letter and not the spirit of My teaching."

The fountain in the Court now shot up higher and the halo of light and colour was gorgeous and grand; far away in the distance this display seemed suddenly to be repeated with a thousandfold increased beauty and magnificence. Now, there was a movement among the people; all appeared to congregate on the mossy sward, yet their touch was so light, that not a blade seemed to be disturbed or displaced.

The Court was soon full, as they came teeming through the doorways which opened into it, and then with one simultaneous movement they all knelt down, casting their faces almost to the ground. The effect was striking in its exactness and in the enormous mass of wealth of colour presented, lighted up, as it was, by the piercing radiance of the fountain light, which now shone more brilliantly than at any time previously. Then, they raised their heads, and soon, the sound of one harmonious Song was heard, sometimes descending to the faintest whisper and then ascending with a mighty crescendo to the volume of a great chorus.

Ida listened: she could hear most distinctly every word, and the beauty of the scene as well as the impressive spectacle before her well nigh overcame the little power she then possessed. She was then suddenly startled by a great noise, preceded, as it was, by a low rumbling sound. Ida had heard of the "Crack of Doom," but this seemed more terrific, more telling and scathing in its violence and voice-like effect, than anything she had ever experienced before. Yet those poor "savages" were not afraid, nor did they in the least appear to be affected by its imperious tone. Ida clung to her Guide's hand, and He, noticing that she was trembling, in kindest words told her not to fear, and He would tell her and show her the cause of this seeming disturbance. They then proceeded down a long avenue of beautiful trees, covered with the richest spring-green foliage; the branches interlaced each other, shaping the whole into a majestic Gothic archway; at the point of the archway clusters of large bell-shaped yellow flowers hung in immense garlands, causing an effect similar to a great golden beam from end to end. They traversed the avenue until they arrived at a point where two angels

stood on either side of a massive door. Not the beardless angels of Italian artistic fancy, with flowing robes and silver trumpets fixed in delicate and dainty mouths, but men with long white beards, deep-set eyes, open countenance, fine forehead, and hair grey with years of thought and time. They exhibited the most marked reverence to Ida's Guide ; one by crossing his body with the tips of his fingers and repeating an ejaculatory prayer, and the other by a deep solemn bow. They unlocked the door, which, being flung wide open, presented a scene never to be forgotten, for instead of light was Stygian darkness, thick and close—it could be felt and touched. No wonder the youthful colour left dear Ida's cheeks ; no wonder the maiden hung back terrified and stricken with fear. Surely her Guide would not take her there : how could such a place be in Heaven, which to her had always and all over been a place of light and love ? But the Guide went on, gently leading her by the hand, and as they moved, she noticed how the bright light of purity and truth seemed to precede every step they took, forming what she had read of—"A lamp unto her path." She then noticed in dull red lines over another doorway the words "Religion, not Truth." Here was a low monotonous wail—"Bow down before the Altar of the Lord." The Guide then opened the inner door. She noticed that this was the only door which was not opened on His approach. They found themselves in a vast and stately building, with elaborately carved seats, dimly lighted with massive mullioned windows, through which the sun of Heaven could scarcely shine. Here were crowds of pale-faced men and women, whose excited features were not brightened by a smile, and on whose cheeks the flush of beauty seemed never to have

shone. Austere in their look, forbidding in their manner, cool in their reception. Love to them was an apparition, and Ida could only distinguish the despair of ceremonial pomp and form, without even the outline of that meekness and humility which Christ had consecrated and blessed. Here, Religion was a marketable commodity; the incense of earth mixed strangely with the quintessence of Heaven.

"These who reside in this mansion," said the Guide to Ida, "are some of the preachers and worshippers of earth, who sell their bodies and souls, and would fain sell My Name for dross. They think to serve My Father by their doctrinal disquisitions and eloquent speech; they are utterly divided amongst themselves; they are petulant towards each other. They have three great communions: one the Anglican, another the Roman, and the third the Nonconformist. Each says the other is wrong; they call one another heretics and schismatics; they all forget that I had only one common table for My last Supper; their hearts are far from Me." All round the vast pile were set up numerous sanctuaries, some decorated more grotesquely than others, many with varied coloured lights stated to have been "daily burning" for hundreds of years, some with no light at all.

Listen to their own claims to a title in heaven: "I represent the only true and original Christian Church. That cannot be disputed. Did not our Lord say to our Founder, the Divine Apostle, 'Thou art Peter, and on this Rock have I built my Church'? Did he not further say 'Feed my Sheep'? Are not all other Christian Churches offshoots representing a cursed schism? Our faith is so simple that none need go astray. Summarized, it only means 'Trust the priest,' and surely, as Christ endowed

us with the power of absolution and remission of sins we ought to be trusted. Our interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, based as it is upon the study and research of our most learned men, ought to be accepted without question or inquiry. On this head the time will come when the decrees and words of His Holiness the Pope, as the Vicar of Christ, will be most righteously declared to be infallible. I unhesitatingly declare that to reach heaven (I mean the Heaven as I think it ought to be) you must believe in the Seven Sacraments, the offering of the Mass, transubstantiation, purgatory, the veneration of saints, relics and images, the efficacy of indulgences and the unquestioned supremacy of my Church. I am indeed puzzled to know how these other people, who do not believe in these doctrines, entered. There must have been some mistake. Perhaps I am not in Heaven at all—only Purgatory—yet I fully expected to know Heaven when I got there.” Passing on, Ida and her Guide came to another sanctuary, a modification of the last one. Here they heard other words. “I represent the Catholic and Apostolic Church, the only true Church, freed, as it is, from all trace of corruption, internal vice and superstitious veneration. I know our organization, like our foundation, came from Rome, but we are gradually freeing ourselves from Papal domination, and some day I venture to prophesy one of our kings will cut the Gordian knot, and we shall no longer be subject to the intolerant spirit under which we now labour. Still, we have to be careful to see that our people do not develop such freedom as to abolish the doctrinal essentials of holy baptism by my Church, confirmation and the laying on of hands, as also the use of incense and processional lights, and the reservation of the consecrated elements.

If these only are believed in and acted upon, Heaven should be full of happy saints, and yet I see—I see others here who are not of that faith. I don't believe in Purgatory, so I suppose this must be Heaven. Why should I doubt? I wonder if I brought too many of those earthly creeds with me. Saturated as I was with those ideas, I might have made a mistake myself." And he went off humming, but scarcely practising—

"The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord."

Peering into the future, as all dreamers may do, Ida saw another vivid picture proving how soon the ideas of the last preacher had developed, and Free Churches, with a free religion, had brought about in the Christian mind what George Eliot in modern times has termed "the right of the individual to general haziness." In the adjoining sanctuary was a holy saint with weird look, full of sadness, down upon his knees. With lengthened arms, extended above his head, he was shouting at the top of his voice "Glory, glory be to God!" "Praise the Lord!" as though Heaven depended upon the strength of his oral deliverances, and Christ were deaf. Excitement and gesticulation seemed part and parcel of his belief. Occasionally he referred to "the penitent form," but Ida rather concluded, from what he said, that he believed that such a piece of furniture could only be found in his particular sanctuary. He was also impressive and fervent in creating a prejudice in the minds of his hearers against the use of the word "Amen" at the conclusion of each hymn or prayer. Some preferred its use; others most strongly objected to it, and yet so simple a word had

been known to divide a large congregation. It sounded so much like "Church." They seemed to forget that by the exaggeration of these trivial differences, they were not only showing a spirit of intolerance, but assisting those to whom they were most vehemently and religiously opposed. In the words of Hilary of Poitiers, "Faith gathers strength through opposition."

Ida was quite puzzled. She wondered, too, if this particular mansion was part of Heaven. There seemed such an absence of love and charity—all were preaching those virtues—none were practising them.

"Yet among them all
None were so formed to love, and to be loved,
None to delight, adorn."

Some there were with gorgeous vestments which might have been copied from Joseph's coat of many colours; some who would or could only preach in black gowns, others with similar affection for white gowns, some who thought it a sin to preach in any sort of gown at all. Some there were who called themselves "The Elect," others who wished to know if anyone had entered without having been baptised and confirmed. One would boast he had regularly attended the early communion, whilst another would shout at the top of his voice condemning the practice. The discord was disheartening, the confusion rapidly developed into revolt, which the preachers rather encouraged than otherwise, until at last this religious atmosphere, charged with the most dangerous of all compounds—a mixture of sectarian hatred and cash—brought about that rumble and crash which had so seriously disturbed poor Ida. She begged in her simplest style to be taken back to the "savages," where at least some sense of propriety pre-

vailed, and where the virgin soil had not been cultured to such a degree as to destroy all vitality and growth.

The Master Guide retraced His steps, sadly remarking that this one mansion gave more trouble than all the others put together. Again they found themselves in the thickly shaded Avenue, and taking another turn they soon came into the wild, open country. How her young heart bounded with delight to be as it were once more free! Here were hill and dale, valleys clothed with the freshest of verdure, and mountain tops which glittered in the dazzling sunshine of eternal light. She had seen the Welsh hills across the Dee; she had plucked the blue and white violets surrounding her own dear little home, and many another little heart far away had been made glad with the fragrance of these natural gifts.

How those bright scenes of joy and gladness were brought to her memory! She and the Guide wandered on and on for a long, long distance, gradually rising higher and higher until she saw in the distance a great concourse of beautiful little children, all full of romp and mirth and joy; not a dim eye or tear to be seen, but the brightest and cheeriest of smiles and happiness everywhere. Here and there were some white-winged angels with silken robes directing and attending to their diversions. These were nurses on earth transformed to Sisters in Heaven. Ida never forgot the kind, gentle look of one of them; the auburn tresses seemed to form delicate locks of golden hue, whilst lips of dainty red spoke of volumes of love kisses, reflected in eyes which shone with the bright lustre of love all round. Here was a righteous rusticity without an erring eloquence. There were no ceremonial effusions, no scorching looks or satirical gestures. There was

complete freedom, with a liberty which never developed into licence. Those bright chubby faces, wreathed with smiles and pretty dimples, were jewelled with eyes lustrous as a gem of the purest water. See how they gambol in their innocence, every action breathing vigorous life, mingled with a fondness and devotion which manhood has forgotten and womanly instinct flatteringly copies! There were no sighs or tears there; regret was absent, and the craving terrors of wealth and fortune could never cast a shadow upon their brightness. The Guide simply and slowly said to Ida: "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."

And Ida awoke with a bright smile upon her face, the reflection of the last mansion in Heaven she had seen.



CHAPTER IV.

“MEA CULPA.”

“Every man has a bag hanging before him in which he puts his neighbour's faults, and another behind him in which he stows his own.”

—*Shakespeare.*

THE Prior of Norton was a very important personage, and, during the Palatine jurisdiction of the Norman Earls, sat in the local Parliament at Chester as one of the spiritual peers. He was styled or known as the Lord Prior, and, as such, had precedence on many public occasions, and in general was the attesting witness to important charters. So important and exclusive were the privileges conferred upon the county, that it was no longer considered part of England, and frequent were the passages in written documents that such and such a personage was going to England, when he was simply travelling to the adjoining county.

The Priory, subsequently an Abbey, was surrounded by rich and fertile meadow lands, originally covered with noble forest trees, which,

“clad with summer's pride,
Did spread so broad that heaven's light did hide,
Not pierceable with light of any star.”

Not far away was the wide estuary of the wide-flowing River Mersey, and this, no doubt, suggested the idea of

St. Christopher being chosen as the second patron of the house. The legend of St. Christopher, or the Christ-bearer, was intended to allegorize the Christian's passage over the stormy waves of a troublesome world. He was said to be a countryman of Goliath, and was sent to live near a wide, deep and stormy stream which overflowed its banks, where people attempting to cross it were drowned. One night he was startled in the hut where he dwelt, by the shrill cry of a child, calling him to come and help him over the water. The cry having been repeated thrice, he took his lantern, and, looking out into the dark, saw a little child sitting on the bank, waiting to be carried over the stream. Having lifted him on to his shoulders and taken his staff he entered the water, but the wind blew, and the waves rose and roared, and the child's weight grew every moment heavier and heavier, so that Christopher began to fear that he and his burden would be carried away by the current. He nerved himself to fresh efforts, aided his tottering steps by his staff, and at length reached the opposite shore, where, laying down his young burden gently on the bank, he said to him "O child, whoever thou art, thou hast placed me in great peril by thy weight," to which the child replied, "Wonder not, Christopher, for be it known to thee, that thou hast borne Him who bears the sins of all the world," and to prove his words he bade him plant his staff in the ground and he would see it immediately take root and grow. The giant obeyed and a miracle attested the truth of what he had heard, and made him from that moment a Saint.

The gigantic figure of St. Christopher, cut in stone, carrying the sweet innocence of our Christian religion was placed under a canopy in front of the Priory, and looking



F. Ball, Photographer, Runcorn.

Alf Cooke, Ltd., Leeds & London.

The Statue of Saint Christopher in
Norton Priory Grounds; 1300 A.D.

towards the River Mersey obtained the offerings of many a passing votary.

It was in front of this rough piece of statuary we left Brother John meditating not only over legendary associations, but thinking, perhaps, more of the sweet girl whose hands he had touched, whose voice seemed to thrill every emotion of his soul, and, casting aside all the sweet rules which bound him to the order of St. Augustine, he likened her to the child ideal which was pictured in stone before him, and vowed that to her he would assume the rôle of the Saint who he knew ranked high in the religious observances of his House. If St. Christopher were worthy to bear Him Who bore all sin, surely he, a humble monk—John—might at least bear and assist, with all honesty of purpose and intention, the Ida—his ideal, his idol—who had given his mind strength, his soul wings, and his whole life renewed vigour.

We follow him after Compline—the last service of the day—and see him with his ruddy face, lighted with the glow of thoughts which seemed to take him back to youth’s fond frolics. Just a few drops of holy water sprinkled by the Prior, and then he pulled his cowl over his head and walked into the dormitory. According to rules the monks were to sleep in separate beds, if possible, all in one chamber, the Prior in the midst. Their beds were of mat, some straw, and a pillow, their covering a blanket and a piece of serge. No one was allowed to appear there with his head uncovered. Each of them lay full dressed, with cowl still drawn over the head, with “cuculla”—a cloak covering the head and all the body, with coarse, shaggy cloth in winter, plain cloth without sleeves, and even with stockings over the feet. No one was allowed to read in

bed with a candle. Brethren who wished to get up in the morning before sound of bell, in order to pray or prepare themselves for celebrating private Masses, were allowed to do so; but the other brethren were not to be disturbed or wakened. After sound of bell no brother was to lie in bed without reasonable excuse. In the dormitory, or dorter, as it was sometimes termed, the brethren were required to behave with more quiet self-restraint and devotion than elsewhere. There could be no complaint of heat, for a fire was not allowed, and the currents of air had full room to play under the unceiled roof, naked and bare with the primitive rudeness of roughly-cut beams. A solitary lamp lighted the apartment and cast dim rays upon the crucifix above each sleeper, who in still silence thus obtained seven hours' much-needed rest in winter, and six in summer. Monks are men, and rules, like religion and revelry, require rest.

How fares our hero? Does the covered cowl crystallize the mind and bring sweet sleep like soporific drug? Will the faint light render less visible the pictures which poison, pride, or prejudice paint with colour and depth, more brilliant and lasting than those of Raphael and Rubens? Can the presence of the Holy Prior himself, aided and supported by the whole army of monkhood, rob the thinker of one thought, be it good or be it evil; allay one deep-rooted sorrow, or dim one heart-felt joy? To the mind, rules are ridicule, the tongue is tied; the soul—the mind, never. And yet there be a looking-glass—the face—which sometimes speaks with smiles and sorrows; the inward sigh which never breathes, yet lives; the tongue tied, yet heart riven. And monks, too, have their dreams. What wonder, then, that Brother John should dream; that, like



F. Ball, Photographer, Runcorn.

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Original Doorway at Norton Priory
Leading to Crypt.

St. Christopher, he bore his dear sweet angel of that day right through “ the valley of the shadow ” to the still waters of eternal life, only to place her at the feet of the Lord, her Shepherd and King, she so wished to see ! The thin blanket and the coarser serge may cover the body, but the monk’s mind wanders from the crucifix above to the cottage home—the cottage girl—to Christ Himself. So John’s dormitory that night was wider than the walls, nor was it ceiled by clouds or sky ; his heart was full too—full of Love ; Love for Christ—and Ida. All the rules of St. Augustine were powerless to prevent, to punish, this passion. Tested thus, it might be wrong ; the vow uttered by the tongue might have been broken—not by the tongue, but by the mind, its master.

It was whilst wandering away, far away from the precincts of Norton Priory, he was reminded that he himself had flesh and bones within those walls. There, right before him was the Sacristan trimming the dormitory lamp, and in a few seconds more John was fully alive that he was still in the Priory, by hearing the powerful clang of the great bell.

It was two o’clock in the morning, for the Sacristan had not that day been more wakeful than usual, and therefore had given the monks their full time for sleep and rest. In a few moments this little world was quick with human life and motion. See every eye awake and every hand is making the sign of the Cross. Perhaps some novice, more sleepy than his elders, may in drowsy fashion have stroked his nose, but conscience is not disturbed, for that is young and sleepy too. Possibly there would often be a few stretches, some rubbing of eyes, a contemplative research, and probably a few yawns, before activity asserts

itself. You would there see some boyish freaks when the warmth of youth lies uncovered by blanket or serge. One imagines they were saved considerable trouble in dressing—but still there would be a last perhaps to extinguish the light.

One by one these white figures glide noiselessly, keeping modestly, almost stealthily, close to the walls, leaving the middle space free, where the Prior alone may walk. Their cowls are still drawn over their heads, which are slightly bent down; their eyes are fixed on the ground, and their hands hang down motionless by their sides, wrapt in the sleeves of the cuculla. On they go to the Church, the darkness of which the Sacristan has rendered more visible by trimming the lamp. There were many separate entrances by which different portions of the fraternity flocked in, no doubt with quick steps to rouse themselves from an unwashed sleep. There is, however, perfect silence. Each brother as he enters the Church throws back his cowl and bows to each of the numerous altars he passes and then to the High Altar. The brethren sit in the Choir, in simple stalls ranged on each side of the Church. In front of the stalls of the monks were the novices, kneeling on the pavement and sitting on low seats. The stall of the Prior was on the right hand in the lower part of the Choir, and the Sub-Prior's place was on the opposite side. All the Order knelt in their stalls, with their hands clasped upon their breasts, and their feet close together, and said the Lord's Prayer and the Creed. In this position they remained until the commencement of the *Deus in adjutorium*, when they rose and remained standing during the rest of the service. This service, the first of the day, called Mattins, lasted for about

two hours, during which they chanted psalms interspersed with anthems. The glimmering light of the lamp was not intended to do more than pierce through the gloom of the Church, for the greater part of the service was recited by heart and a candle was placed in that part where the lesson was to be read ; if it were not that their lips moved, they might have been taken for so many white statues ; for their arms were placed motionless upon their bosoms in the form of a cross and every movement was regulated so as to be as tranquil as possible. The deep chanting sometimes seemed supernatural. With such solemnity and devotion do they celebrate the Divine Office that you might fancy Angels' voices were heard in their concert ; by their psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, they draw men to praise God. They imitated the Angels. Their chanting was especially suited for contemplation.

After Mattins was over they did not return to the dormitory for sleep, but were permitted either to pray in the Church, or to sit or walk in the Cloister, which was the very Paradise of the monk. After this, the service called “*Prime*” followed, and this being over, the monks walked in solemn procession to the Chapter House. Here was the school of humiliation ; the place where mingled humility and love was most of all exercised. Around it were ranged seats one above another. In the midst at the upper end was the Prior's chair. A portion of the rules of the Order was read, with a commemoration of the departed faithful, and in some cases a sermon. After each rule had been explained, each brother who had in the slightest way transgressed it came forward and confessed it aloud before the convent. No one except professed Canons was allowed to be present during the secret business of the Chapter.

The warden was directed to close all the doors round the cloister, and exclude all strangers, including even novices while in their first probationary year. The duty of any brother who had transgressed a rule was to rise from his seat, throw back the hood of his cowl, that all might see his face, and throw himself full length on the floor, without speaking a word. The Prior would then ask him, "What sayest thou?" The brother answered "*Mea culpa*" ("It was by my fault"). Then he was bidden to rise in the name of the Lord; he confessed his faults, and after receiving a penance, if it were necessary, he went back to his seat at the bidding of his superior. When all had confessed their own sins, a still more extraordinary scene followed. Each monk accused his brother, if he had seen or heard anything amiss in him. He rose and, mentioning his name, said: "Our dear brother has committed such a fault." Happy they who could thus hear their faults proclaimed in the face of day without being angry. To prevent this, it was customary for the accused to say for his accuser a *Pater Noster* and *Ave Maria*.

Brother John's stolid and stoical face in the Chapter House was a picture. It presented no feature of remorse or weakness. Its beautiful lines were not disfigured with the slightest look of regret or anger, a smile played upon his lips, and the twinkle of his eye showed a composure of mind, not unmixed with the sweet temperament of his genial disposition. He hears "*Mea culpa*," "*Mea culpa*," on each side of him, but his own cowl still remains in a dignified attitude of repose. Suddenly on the other side of the Chapter House rises a brother, with darksome face, ill proportioned appearance, and sanctimonious sneer, known as Brother Kingston. He was well aware of his own

unpopularity nor was it difficult to account for this. He assumed an air of superiority which was offensive, and utterly inconsistent with that humility which is associated with an accuser, whose breastplate should be Truth and Justice. He seemed to be coldness itself, and absolutely deprived of all emotional feeling and love. With loud voice, which contrasted strangely with the faint confessions and self-accusations of his brethren, he said :

“Brother John, I waited patiently to hear thy ‘Mea culpa,’ but it came not. I fully expected thee to be the first to fall down and acknowledge thy faults and the transgressions against our sacred rules which thou well knowest thou committedst before yesterday’s sun was set. Thou art well aware our rules prescribe that no brother shall be influenced by women, nor should the passions of the heart ever allow any of us to forget that our first and last and only love is to God. I have rigorously followed this requirement myself ; thou hast not.”

Brother John rose to reply. Duty, devotion and love perplexed him: duty to his Order, devotion to God, together with a natural love for all that was pure and chaste existed within him, and these conditions, to his simple mind, did not conflict.

Yet he hesitated; to unburden his heart would expose him to certain condemnation from those who had never experienced the finer feelings of truth and love ; to conceal, even the unexpressed thoughts of his tender conscience, seemed almost a crime. The feeble glimmer served to hide the blush he felt. He thought of the living sweetness outside, and contrasted it with the painted waxen figure within, bearing the Holy Child, and whose divinity and authority none there dared to question.

Slowly he collected these scattered ideas, and then rising gracefully but courageously, replied :—

“ Brother Kingston, all that thou hast said of our rules I freely admit, yet withal I hear no charge which requires any confession from myself. Love to God may be exemplified in many and various ways, first and foremost by love of all the beautiful things which He has created, and last of all by a love to others so true and faithful as to forget oneself. Is thy love as great ? ”

“ Ah, now thou dealest with my charge in a general way and I must answer thee accordingly. My love to God has raised me above the world, and all things in it. Thy love lets thee cling to these ; the base passions of human nature are unknown to me. I never knew them, nor am I moved by objects or events in the outside world. My pride of God and this Order doth keep me free from adoring and admiring the worldly pictures which thou hast designated as His creatures. Dost thou want the truth more plainly spoken ? ”

“ Yes,” said John meekly, yet fearingly. “ I want the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. I want the truth, free from the embellishments of all earthly speech. I long for Heaven’s truth, which permits a brother to possess and proclaim that Love which is honoured in all Christendom, a love of the world which will sacrifice an only begotten Son to save from sin. I want to possess a love which dies—for others—not lives like thine to save thyself from perdition.”

The proud and arrogant brother felt this last lash, which cut deep, and a slight and unusual titter was distinguishable in the Chapter House. Brother John was loved and his words and speech were like honey in their mouths.

Still undismayed, Kingston rose again to try a still deeper stab, for his charge arose from a malevolent mind, not becoming that humility which was enjoined.

“Brother John,” he said, trying a more tactical method of winning an esteem he could never gain, “thou evadest my remarks; I fain would have thee confess thy wrong thyself. I acknowledge all thy many virtues and thy loving disposition—perhaps too loving. I pass over the disdain which thou hast tried to heap upon me, and urged only by the duty imposed upon all of us, I ask thee not to think so highly of thine own ability, but humbly to acknowledge that thou, who art an example of the fair name of this noble Priory, hast done thyself and us a wrong, by speaking in the meadows to one fair girl known to all of us as Ida Godman.”

“Ah,” said John, “now thou speakest like a man, just as thou art, and not a monk. Having cast off thy habit, to become a spy or an eavesdropper, thou lackest the evidence which apparently my explanation must supply, to satisfy thy conscience in place of mine, which is quite at ease. I did speak to I—Ida—Ida Godman on her inquiring as to the truth of His Majesty’s intended visit, and told her she would be welcome to the Priory on that memorable occasion. Speaking with all simplicity, and full of feeling, as I frankly admit, I further endeavoured to impress upon her young mind not to put her trust in princes, but with becoming and reverent spirit to search after and find the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, and she, with child-like trust, asked my assistance, which I promised *with all my heart*. That promise she has got, and, having made it, I shall keep it. Seest thou any wrong in that, Brother Kingston, or wert thou jealous that she spoke to me and not to thee?”

Again the titter passed along, and even the Prior smiled, for John was always frank, although he confessed within himself that his promise to assist with all his heart conveyed more intelligence to himself than to his hearers.

Kingston was about to reply, when the noise of his voice was disturbed by the entry of an unexpected stranger and visitor.

"My Lord Prior," shouted the Sacristan, "the King's Knight and Squire."

With these words, and entirely contrary to rules and usage, were ushered into the Chapter House, Sir Barnaby de Gresford, attended by his Squire, Master Stapleton.



CHAPTER V.

THE KING'S MESSENGER.

"It is the curse of Kings to be attended
By slaves that take their humours for a warrant."

—*Shakespeare.*

SIR BARNABY was tall, somewhat ruddy, with dark hair, and wearing a rude form of eye-glass, which possibly added, or was intended to add, strength to his weakness and force to his vanity. Being in the King's service, he presumed upon his position, a presumption all the more necessary to cover his lamentable and occasional habit of stammering. "Facta, non verba," was Sir Barnaby's motto, and although his superiors and confreres were accustomed to style him in friendly tones "Barney," the general carriage of his person, accompanied by the weighty sword at his side, made some amends for his tied-tongue speech and enabled him to execute His Majesty's commands with some degree of awe, especially to those who did not know him. His Squire, indulging in the then and still well-known name of Stapleton, was originally brought up as a scrivener, a man of flippant mood and disposition, well able to supply the words which his Knight often floundered for.

Barney's sudden appearance in military costume at the Chapter House door, during the solemn service which excited so much attention, at once silenced the "Mea

culpa" of all the monks. The Lord Prior was, however, equal to the occasion.

"Wherefore and why comest thou at this hour," he shouted, "to interfere with these our religious exercises, open only to those of this Order?"

The Knight, followed by his Squire, proceeded forward until they became the central figures in the strange scene.

"I—I co—come," he said in stammering sentences, "by order of His Majesty the K—K—King, who has sent me in advan—advance to pre—prepare for his re—reception."

"What is thy name?" called the Abbot.

"Barnaby de Gresford, Knight, of Barnewell Hall, Bucks."

"What proof have we of thy commission and for what purpose dost thou come?"

Here Barny fumbled for the papers which he had been holding in his heated and twitching hands, for although accustomed to deal in a rough and ready sort of way with breaches of discipline in the King's household he would just then have preferred to be saved from all acts of violence, for he by no means liked the outward appearance of these religious brothers, who involuntarily had risen from their seats, as if to support the austere remarks of their dignified chief.

Barny was about to read the order entrusted to him, but the dark gloom was not well adapted for this purpose, so he applied the eye-glass to his right eye, and, balancing his body on his left foot, so as to restore the equilibrium occasioned by the use of such a rude instrument, proceeded to reply.

"My orders from His Majesty the K—King ar—r—re to

inform the Lord Prior and mon—monks—monkeys”—(consternation)—“ahem! the monks and Abbots—the Abbot and monks of this Priory that on the occasion of the King’s visit, they should find a young damsel to join the King’s ser—service, and to accompany His Majesty and myself on our return to the Court at Oxford. Here be His Majes—Majesty’s obedient—no, lawful com—com—com—mands. God save the K—K—King.”

Barney had learned to pronounce this latter proclamation with such fire and figure, his eye-glass fell and the Royal Decree ignominiously tumbled on the balancing foot, so that had not the Squire involuntarily shouted “Eyes front” the Knight would have cut as sorry a figure as Don Quixote.

However, the news was heard with consternation, and closed the mouths of all present. It was an insult, they thought, from the King, that monks of any monastery or priory should be expected to know how or where to find some female to answer the King’s requirements, nor could they but wonder why so strange a command should be addressed to them, or for what purpose a simple Cheshire girl should have to wander so far as Oxford in company with these rough hirelings, for several days, before receiving the protection of the Queen.

Still Barney de Gresford held his ground, nor did his mission—and not the first of its kind—shame him.

Brother Kingston now spoke: “If the King’s command must be obeyed, whereof there can be no question in matters secular, then we can see it executed with advantage to this Order and to the honour of the King. Father, there be the maid whom Brother John discoursed with in the afternoon of yesterday. Let the Knight take her, and

free our noble brother from that temptation which, if not removed, may cause further embarrassment, greater than that which was only relieved by the entry of this Royal messenger. In this demand I see the hand of God and Heaven."

For several minutes there was no reply. At last Sir Barny broke this speaking silence.

"Where is the ma—ma—id, of whom this religious man talketh? Is she comely and fair? Is she a sweet twenty or a wizen fifty? What pleaseth monk must please me. Doth her pater live hereabouts or are both pater and mater dead? If so be, then she will come the more read—readily; but no matter, the King's or—or—order must be obeyed."

"Barny de Gresford, I challenge the King's authority so to act, nor shalt thou or any of thy following touch one hair of this maiden's head. She is pure and gentle now, and thus shall she remain. Go thou. Get thee gone. The King hath no power within these sacred precincts, and I challenge thee, his messenger." This was Brother John's remark.

This was boldness itself, especially in the Prior's presence. Barny twitched his hands, which were as moist as his face, covered as it was with hot confusion and wrath. He felt for his trusty sword, but his hand would not act. His stammering tongue refused to talk, and with ungainly gait he left the Chapter House inwardly vowing vengeance upon Brother John, and shame and dishonour upon the very Prior himself.

The Prior, shrewd and clear-headed, not liking the business at all, called Barny to his own apartments for food, begging him and his Squire to partake of the Priory's

hospitality, and with great pretences excusing and condemning the language of Brother John. Was it now the turn of the Prior to say his "Mea culpa" ?

Just before daylight pierced the recesses of the cloisters two men were seen talking secretly, yet earnestly, together. One was the King's messenger and the other Brother Kingston.



CHAPTER VI.

THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE KING'S VISIT.

"The name of that much-loved flower—the daisy, signifies literally Day's Eye—the flower which opens its eye to the day or when the day dawns ; opens it widest when the sun is at its height, and shuts it altogether when the sun goes down."

—*Prof. G. Wilson.*

It was in October, 1323, that King Edward II. had occasion to visit the castle of Halton with the view of punishing the adherents of the late Thomas Earl of Lancaster. Halton, the castle of the rebel Earl, was distant about two miles from Norton Priory. His Majesty landed at Liverpool, then a mere village. He afterwards sailed up the Mersey from that place to Ince on the Cheshire side of the estuary, and from thence marched with his bodyguard to Halton. The Earl of Lancaster, though his death had been ignominious, had befriended the monks, the clergy and the Church, and by them, and all whom they could influence—and their power at that time was great—the Earl was idolised. It was given out that he was a martyr, and then that he was a saint. A chapel was erected to him on the spot where he had suffered ; a litany was composed in his honour, and miracles were alleged to be wrought at his tomb. This posthumous popularity, which for a time went on increasing, was very offensive to His Majesty, who thought it should be checked and if possible suppressed.

The pretended miracles were denied by royal proclamation. Accordingly, on the 23rd of October, 1323, when the King was at Liverpool, he wrote a letter commanding his Commissioners to proscribe the miracles said to have been wrought at the tomb of two adherents of the Earl. During the time he held his Court at Halton, and received the homage of the inhabitants, he indulged in his taste for music and minstrelsy. The King was not in the most gracious of moods: his temper was disturbed by the necessity of making this long and tedious journey, so as to convince himself and his subjects that his sovereignty was still to be respected and honoured. Minstrels from different parts of the country had been gathered together to interest and amuse His Majesty during his stay at the Castle of Halton, especially on his return in the afternoon from hunting in the district. Sir Barny was in the nature of a universal provider—responsible, not only for the supplies necessary to feed the King and his retinue, but also to prevent a single dull moment arising, which would no doubt occasion His Majesty displeasure. It was therefore appropriate that the Prior of Norton should, with a view of winning the King's esteem, be asked to arrange for the production in the Priory itself of one of those Mystery Plays then so common in the county.

"Lord Prior," said Sir Barny, recovering himself a little, "the King cometh to visit this Priory in two days' time; what provision canst thou make for his reception and entertainment? It would be well for thee and thy brethren that what thou doest should be done well, and with the desire to obtain His Majesty's respect and esteem."

"Sir Barnaby," replied the Prior, "it is our will that

we should be honoured with a visit from the King : as for repast, that shall be provided nobly, and in accordance with our well-known hospitality. The size and extent of our guest house doth prove this. But for entertainment of a pleasurable kind we are somewhat in doubt what provision should be made. Canst thou advise and assist ? ”

“ Oh, yes, Prior ; in a county like this, where the air one breathes is full of life and vigour, where every man and maid is, we know, a picture of beauty and health, we would submit there can be no trouble in satisfying even the wishes of a King.”

“ Ah ! ” said the Prior, “ whilst we shall welcome him right heartily, his stay here will be short, whereas we do more than provide for the morrow. We live amongst these people : our desire is always to retain their love and respect. Anything, therefore, which is done must be with due regard to the calling of our high office and the sacred duties imposed upon us.”

“ Prior, thou art always preaching. Some of thy flock seem to be better judges than thou ; the seclusion of these walls tends to narrow thy mind and prevent the enjoyment of those rural pleasures which ring through Merrie England. If thou wert to come to Halton this very evening, thou wouldst see the people honour the King after their own hearts and feelings. There be bull-baiting and cock-fighting, with the best which this great county can produce ; there be fencing and archery by the most skilled of men. We shall have a grand tournament before we leave Halton, and the ladies, of whom there will be plenty, will throw their gloves and rings to the winner. We are not all monks, canons or friars, and never will be. God save us from such a punishment ! ”

"Sir Barnaby, we punish ourselves now, so that we be not punished hereafter; it is that which thou shouldst pray God may deliver thee from. However, what dost thou say if we produce that most remarkable of all Cheshire Mystery Plays, "The Nativity"? It was but lately written by one of the most learned of our Benedictine brethren at Chester—a young monk named Ranulph Higden—he will of a surety come over and assist us."

"Good, Father, the very thing with a fine young plump maid for the Virgin and three fat monks for the Wise Men of the East."

"Well! Well!" said the Prior, not wishing to take offence; "our Virgin Mother is pictured in these windows and in our Church, as a woman to be adored, not only for her own personal beauty, which was great, but also as the Mother of One who died to save thee from thy many sins."

"Ah! Father, even thou admittest that monks cannot live without the picture of a pretty woman to gaze upon; much better (save me, Mary!) it should be a real one. Wilt thou pardon my submitting a further suggestion, and that is that the Maid of Overton should be asked to represent the Virgin; she hath a reputation which makes me jealous."

"How now!" said the Prior; "who put that thought into thy head? I knew her mother, who was of the Luxmore family, bonny, bright, and cheerful as she then was, but now, as I understand, bowed down with troubles not of her own making, but which her amiable and beautiful daughter Ida tends to lighten in every possible way. Ida is, no doubt, quick and clever, above the average, but withal of most loving and generous disposition. I would not for one moment a single hair of her head should be

hurt or the shadow of a cloud cast over her bright and sunny face."

"Prior, thou hast only magnified her capacity and ability to take the holy part I have mentioned ; I have, forsooth, to please the King and his courtiers, whether it be in meal or malt. In the King's name, I command that this Miracle Play be acted and that the Maid of Overton take the principal part. Shall I instruct her myself ?"

"Thee instruct her ! What dost thou mean ? Thee instruct anyone in any sacred duty ! It falls not to thy lot or part : thou art not fit to touch the child, nor shalt thou do it, though Norton Priory be demolished."

Sir Barny realising his mistake, and fearing complaints of his conduct might be lodged with His Majesty, quietly but respectfully said . " My Lord Prior, I only intended to save thee trouble by suggesting that I should instruct her to see thee with a view to her carrying out what hath been proposed."

Just then, Brothers John and Kingston came in to the Abbot's chamber and were informed of the King's command. John was inclined to disagree with the proposal, but Kingston, with other designs in his head, thought the idea could be readily carried out, and ventured to suggest that he himself should be despatched at once, to convey the tidings to Ida and her mother, and that he should accompany her from her house on the Overton Hills to the Priory. This roused John's ire, and although he stifled his indignation, he, as the senior brother, said, " I will fetch Ida, if the Prior will permit, and bring her hither safely. May I take the part of Joseph ?"

The curly scrubby nose of Brother Kingston became

more curly and scrubby, until it almost resembled a crookedly bent rushen candle partly melted with heat.

The Prior noticed this, as also his ashen face. Suspecting more than he said, he deputed Brother John to bring Ida to his own chamber so that due and proper instruction might be given to her. He further permitted, much to John's pleasure, that he should learn the part of Joseph; and added that if Brother Kingston wished to act, he might dress up as an ass in the stable of the Nativity, and Sir Barnaby, as the King's dispenser, could administer due and sufficient provender.

This sarcastic order of the Lord Prior was received with suppressed smiles, for no brother ever ventured to differ from any command of his Superior.

Brother John, on his arrival at the home at Overton, was received with every token of pleasure by Ida and her mother. How beautifully clean seemed every nook and corner of their home! The bright log fire gave out a warm glow, almost, but not quite, as warm as John's heart. With his head slightly bent, he told his mission, wrapping it up coaxingly in the suggestion that it would enable both of them to get a near view of the King. Although she knew and trusted John above everyone—even her own husband—Ida's mother seemed somewhat perplexed; she did not trust the King's courtiers; besides, Ida was her favourite child—the others, Doris, Mabel, and Stanton, were her children, but Ida was the eldest—the first-born—the full-grown flower of the family. John's persuasion, his promises to look after her, his sacred vow that no harm should befall her, at last prevailed.

On the way to the Priory, Ida walked by his side, clinging to the monastic garments he wore; his hands were braced

in front of him, for he feared himself and his holy calling if he should but touch her. He struggled manfully not to show his innermost feelings, the feeling of purest, tenderest, sweetest, holiest love. May not a monk love? The law—the Order—seemed to say, No! He was already married—and she knew it—married to God and the Church; had he not renounced the world? He recalled that blessed promise: “Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for My sake and the Gospel’s, but he shall receive a hundred-fold, now, in this time, and in the world to come eternal life.” He thought, was not this a selfish love, a love with a reward—a love of no value? The struggle was all within. Love, true love, even sacred vows could not blot out, nor monkish garb imprison. Fain would his hands have responded by tearing off those clothes of office. His tongue is tied, though tipped with honeyed sweetness. His lips quiver; his hands shake; his eyes only see one Heaven—Love—imprisoned Love, and he too must be both prisoner and gaoler. Not a word escapes. The pretty hill flowers are freer; the birds and the bees fly gaily by, chirping and buzzing to each other in that world of Nature’s freedom—all—all suggest a love denied to him.

“ Love is life’s end; an end, but never ending;
All joys, all sweets, all happiness awarding;
Love is life’s wealth; ne’er spent but ever spending,
More rich by giving; taking, by discarding:
Love’s life’s reward, rewarded in rewarding;
Then from thy wretched heart fond care remove.
Ah! shouldst thou live but once love’s sweets to prove
Thou wilt not love to live, unless thou live to love.”

He thinks and thinks, why should he love? How is it that he, shut out from the world, should be the subject of

this strange feeling ; cannot he possibly quench it ? No, the more he tries to subdue these emotions, the stronger they grow. Then, as though inspired with some Divine idea, he asks himself—"Is it from God ? Is it wrong to love ? Was he right in taking the sacred vow : if so, why does not God assist him in keeping it ? He was told to love God, and this proved that love must exist, even in a monk. Was not pure love for a sweet girl rather to be cherished as being the nearest earthly approach to the love of God ?"

"No sweeter joy could God confer on man,
No higher bliss do Angels know than love."

These were the puzzled thoughts of Brother John, walking leisurely through the pasture fields with Ida close by his side, not a word was spoken by either. Suddenly his hands fall down from the front of his breast and the accidental touch of Ida's own hand brought him to himself.

"Ida, Ida," he said ; then he stopped, tongue-tied.

"Yes, Father John," she replied.

"Ida, did I not promise thou shouldst see the King ? He is now at Halton, but comes to the Priory in three days' time, and we have promised to entertain him there. We want to show him another and greater King, born of our Blessed Virgin, and we want thee to take the part of the Queen of Heaven. The Prior himself will instruct thee."

"Oh ! Father John, I am not worthy. I am but a simple country maiden, with but little learning and less experience."

"Ida, those reasons which thou hast given best prove thy fitness for the part ; then too, thy face most vividly recalls to mind the beautiful angels of our Priory windows.

I should love to see thee take the highest part in the play of the Nativity which we propose should be acted before His Majesty. Thy country innocence, combined with thy quick natural intelligence, commends itself to the Prior and all the brethren except—except one who—— ”

“ Father, who doth object, and for what reason? ”

“ Ida, he is a brother against whom I am not permitted to say a word or imagine an evil thought. I hope I am mistaken, but I do not think he loves thee—he loves thee, but—but not—as—as I do.”

“ Father John, dost thou love me? Why, what have I done to win thy esteem or love or cause thee to care for me? ”

Brother John picked up a bright little daisy with its central glow of gold and radiating beams of white.

“ See there, Ida: this is the day's eye—it reminds me of the bright golden sunshine with its illuminating rays which not only lightens up our path, but also makes our love to grow, and gladdens our hearts. Thou art my daisy, and when weariness of body and soul overtakes us—at least to one—the picture of thy sweet face is helpful and full of gladness, even like that of our Holy Mother.”

“ Father, thy kind, sweet words are like the real sun to the real daisy; dost thou think the sun loves the daisy? ”

“ Ah! Ida, the sun helps the daisy to grow and look more brightly, so when the sun is gone, and night comes on, the little daisy folds itself up, waiting for the return of its life-giver.”

“ Father, if I be thy little daisy, wilt thou be the big shining sun: wilt thou always afford me the light and heat I so much need? If it be right for thee to love the little daisy flower, which does nothing but grow and grow, until

it is cut and withered, why may I not love the sun which shines for me and all other daisies for ever and ever?"

Again, the rules of the Order appeared in spectral lines : again, the strife within. It was only a matter of conscience. Then he bethought himself that the rules did not say that he must not love: in fact there were the words writ large—"God is love"; but could he love God more than this sweet little flower: God, Whom he had never seen, never touched; God the Judge of all mankind—and judges seemed to him to be always so sedate and serious, and often without sunshine?

Ah! just then the words crossed his thoughts—"Consider the lilies of the field, for they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you that Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these." Solomon was a king; were they not told to honour the king?—and yet a lily was more lovely than a king, and therefore was entitled to more honour than the greatest of kings. Were not the daisies growing by the thousands in the pasture fields around the Priory quite as beautiful as the lily? Both grew—both were God's creation, but the thousand little wild daisies gave less trouble than one great lily. Human nature prevailed, and so he concluded that, without breaking any sacred vow, he might love—love a little daisy flower—love a little daisy girl.

"Ida, dear," he said, as sweetly as the rough untutored treatment of monastic learning and solitude would permit, "I will be thy sun: thou shalt be my daisy. Take care that thou art not plucked up in the darkness of the night, when I am trying to shine elsewhere surrounded by the dry dead stones of Norton Priory walls. Just as there are other suns in the starry heavens, there are other brothers within

our walls, but, like those distant suns, they dimly shine and then only at night : they give out no heat, and little daisies would die and wither if dependent upon such wintry love and warmth."

"Father John, I love the sunshine of thy words. I know not what or why it is, but my heart beats with joy. I cannot tell thee how wild and glad I feel : it seems like the opening, the creation of a new life—a new world—full of nothing else but white daisies with their yellow centres, all stretching out to the only sun they know." Then as if untutored and unrestrained Nature alone asserted herself, without teacher or instructor, the little daisy wanted to dip ruby-red lips right into a bath of sunshine.

It was the first kiss of Love.

Who shall describe it ?

It was not the kiss of woman with woman or the embrace of man with man. It was not the kiss of father and daughter or of husband and wife. It was the first kiss of truest, deepest love. It was the kiss which appeals to the soul ; the kiss which creates a blush—not of shame, but of inexpressible joy. The kiss which never dies—is never forgotten.

Whilst the honey of its sweetness still lingered, both were startled to see Brother Kingston accompanied by Sir Barnaby appear from behind a thicket, both faces covered with sarcastic smiles and ugly grimaces. "Is this thy 'Mea culpa'?" cried out Brother Kingston. "Is this the way thou carriest out my Lord Prior's commands? Is this thy manner of taking care of the Maid of Overton? Go and report thyself to thy Superior before I acquaint the Brotherhood. Hast thou forgotten that the great St. Bernard when his eyes had rested with a feeling of

pleasure on the face of a beautiful woman, shocked at his own weakness, rushed into a pool of water more than half frozen and stood there till feeling and life had nearly departed?"

To which Brother John replied, "I decline to take any order except from my superiors: the duty cast upon me by the Prior I shall discharge at all cost. Moreover, Kingston, thou lookest thyself with jealous eye upon the Maid of Overton. Go thou and dip in the deepest pool of the Mersey, and even then thy evil designs will not all be cleansed away."

Sir Barny here interposed, "I am not affected by any such rules. I can—can—look upon this b—beau—beautiful picture of life and be satisfied without touching her."

"True, Sir Barny, because I am present. Neither thee nor Kingston will touch her while I am alive. She is to play the part of the Queen of Heaven, and a secular like thou shalt not molest or interfere. Put back thy sword. Come, Ida, come along with me to the Prior."

The look of Brother Kingston betokened mischief.



CHAPTER VII.

THE CHESHIRE MYSTERY PLAY.

And all that shall see them, shall moste welcome be,
Soe all that here them, wee moste humble praye
Not to compare this matter or storie
With the age or tyme wherein we presentlye staye,
But in the tyme of ignorance, wherein we did straye;
Then doe I compare that this lande throughout
Non had the like, nor the like dose sett out.

—*Proemium to Plays.*

THE irresponsible illiterate is, after all, responsible for much of our history. His impress was decidedly deeper before printing was invented, as also when books were scarce and manuscripts so valuable as to require chains for their preservation and protection. The fact that he could not write or read enabled him to become physically stronger, and so he often turned out to be a good archer, a man not to be despised in battle. This was the more necessary during a period when might was right, as compared with to-day, when right is might. In the absence of railway trains he was trained on horseback. Yet some form of instruction must be provided if Biblical teaching, even of an elementary character, were to be given. In some of our old towns may be seen sculptured crosses of diverse forms dating back many centuries; indeed the cross is our most ancient symbol. Protestants of to-day sometimes shudder at the idea of these stone monuments being erected, and regard them as a sure sign

of the period when Romanism largely prevailed. Romanists examine and shiver at the thought that each disfiguring mark, whether of time or otherwise, represents a blow at their ideal. But the antiquarian and historian remember these old crosses as the picture books of ancient days. The life and death of Christ had to be taught; the people must be instructed in the Great Atonement. The sculptor of the past took the place of the printer of the present. The cross of stone in the market-place told, as plainly and as forcibly as the printed book of to-day, the story of the Crucifixion. So when the poor peasant had not the chance to read the words in a book, he stood in the market-place and read the stone-cut picture of the Cross. For colour he looked at the beautiful painted forms in the windows of the Sanctuary, For form and graphic detail he looked at the waxen image of the Virgin Mother, with the Infant Jesus in her arms; surrounded by that halo of glory which artistic ideas have always pictured above the Head of the Saviour of men.

A further medium of instruction, by means of the eye, was afforded in the Mystery or Miracle Plays. In present days we have them carried out in a more refined and elaborate manner, in the Passion Play of Oberammergau or the beautiful Historical Pageant of Chester of 1910. Mystery Plays were, in the days gone by, practised and performed in Cheshire: so when our Cheshire hinds could not read the stories of the Old and New Testament out of the Bible, they were impressed, perhaps more forcibly, by seeing these Plays performed in the Cathedral Town and elsewhere, and thus they obtained their first ideas of the Creation, the death of Abel, Noah's Ark, the histories of Lot and Abraham, and so on until we come to the New

Testament, where the stage players produced the Salutation and the Nativity, the play of the shepherds, the slaughter of the Innocents, Lazarus and many other subjects. Indeed so realistic were some of the plots that we read of charges for coals to keep up hell fire, and that on one occasion hell itself took fire and was nearly burnt down.

Elaborate preparations were therefore made at the Priory to show the Play of the Nativity to impressive advantage before the King. Ida had to be instructed in the principal part of the Virgin, and Brother John was delighted to act as Joseph, her espoused husband. Other parts were those of the Angel Gabriel; Octavius discoursing with his servitors on the prodigies which had been seen at the beginning of his reign, his first sight of the Virgin and Child in the sky accompanied by a vision of Paradise. These as well as other minor characters had to be provided for.

The chancel of the Priory Church was converted into a kind of Nativity Stable with carpet of green branches from the neighbouring woods. The High Altar was so arranged as to be suitable for the reception of the Infant, and as nearly as possible to resemble some sort of manger. Rushen chairs were provided in the nave for the noble and numerous retinue which accompanied His Majesty. A chair of State, beautifully carved and worked, was placed for the King, and near it, but a little in the rear, was the seat of the Lord Prior. The star in the East was to shine on the High Altar and some silver tinsel had been purchased and cut to make this representation complete. A long flowing garment of white had been obtained from Chester with which to clothe the Virgin in a suitable and

becoming manner. For two days the Priory had been alive with preparation: religious exercises had to be postponed and "Mea culpa" no longer was heard. The King was to arrive at the hour for vespers, after he had finished the day's sport, and as the nights were then somewhat dark, great preparations had to be made to afford as much artificial light as possible. Still it was hoped that the dim ray from the rush candles and cressets or bowls of tallow with wicks, provided by the sacristan, would hide defects, give courage to the players acting, and sensibly help to impress the royal audience with a religious atmosphere. Ida had been assigned the sole occupancy of a small chamber leading out of the cloisters. She was only permitted to take exercise by herself when the brethren were not using this part of the Priory. The Lord Prior placed her under his own special care and protection; this was the more necessary as he had become aware that her presence had occasioned considerable comment, and whispers were somewhat loud, of the responsibility involved. She herself had no fear; the promise of Brother John was quite sufficient. She knew full well he would save her from all possible harm.

By an ingenious arrangement of pulleys, the drop scene, which consisted of light evergreens, was to be hoisted up into the roof of the Church, so displaying the rude and primitive stable of the Nativity. Joseph was to enter with a long lament and recital of the unnatural condition of his Virgin wife, after which she was to appear, bearing the Holy Child, whilst a small crowd of Brothers dressed in quaint costumes were to be strangers and sojourners in the Inn at Bethlehem.

The King and his nobles had at last arrived, and, having

taken some slight refreshment with the Lord Prior, His Majesty took his seat in the Royal Chair surrounded by his retinue. At the back of the Church the people of the villages for miles round filled up every niche. Ida's mother was there. His Majesty's Chamberlain gave the signal to proceed and the evergreen curtain was hauled out of sight. The dim light, the subdued silence, the plaintive wail of the music of the minstrels made the opening scene impressive. Presently the star in the East shone forth and the Inn, which was full, poured forth its numerous visitors, in divers coloured garments. The first actor to appear was Brother John in the character of Joseph. In low and trembling voice, yet clear, although full of pathos and woe, we hear his agitated speech, delivered as though every word pierced his noble heart :

“Alas ! Alas ! and woe's me !
 Who hase made her with childe ?
 Alas ! where might I lenge or lende ?
 For loth is me my wife to shende,
 Therefore from her will I wende
 Into some other place.
 For to discreve her will I naughte,
 Fowlye though shee have wroughte,
 To leave her privelye is my thoughte,
 That no man know this case :
 Therefore when I have slepte a while,
 My wife that can me thus begyle,
 For I will goe from her, for her to file
 Me is loth in good faye.
 This case makes me so heavye,
 That nedes slepe, nowe muste I :—
 Lorde, on her thou have mercie,
 For her misdeede to daie.

After this passage, Joseph lies himself down on the green branches of the floor and appears to fall asleep, quite overcome with the physical strain of his journey and the

mental excitement occasioned by his discovery. An angel now appears to comfort him.

“Joseph, lette be thy feible thoughte,
Take Marye thy wife, and dred the naughte,
For wickedlye shee hath not wroughte,
But this is Gode's will.
The childe that shee shall beare, i—wysse
Of the Holye Ghoste begotten is
To save mankinde that did amisse,
And prophescie to fulfill.”

Then Joseph, with that meek and forgiving disposition which was so characteristic, not only of the Husband of Mary, but of Brother John himself, rouses himself, and listening to the tender admonition he has just received, replies :—

“Ah ! nowe I wotte, Lorde, yt is soe,
I will no man be her foe,
But while I maie on earth goe
With her I wil be ;
Nowe Christe is in our kinde lighte,
As the prophescye before heighte.
Lorde God, moste of mighte,
With wayle I worshippe Thee.”

Now should have entered the Virgin, preceded by the Angel Gabriel, whose part was the salutation :—

“Heale be thou, Mary, mother ffree.
Full of grace, God is with thee,
Among all women, blessed thou be,
And the frute of thy bodye.”

The noble audience was full of expectation—the Queen of Heaven was about to appear—the Virgin—Maiden—Mother. But to that somewhat rude and uncouth audience, the excitement was the greater because it was well known that Ida was of surpassing beauty. This, too, was her first appearance in any public form. The blush of youth was sure to colour that handsome face ; every ear

was waiting patiently to hear the faint whispered words of the untrained country girl. Her mother's heart beat high with joy, and she was proud that her darling child should be allotted so important a part. There was a long pause.

Gabriel was seen, with excited face, waiting as the herald of the Prince of Peace ; yet there seemed no Prince —no Peace. Gabriel was beckoning wildly to someone down the Prior's passage leading to the Chancel. The face of Joseph was a study. Would not his forgiving words appeal to the tender heart of Mary, "his espoused wife?" He wished to see the Babe of which he was not the Father, the woman whom he had married, but forsooth he thought to have been untrue. Consternation prevails not only in the chancel but in the nave ; the Lord Prior leaves his chair, but only to find that Ida has gone ! She is nowhere to be found !

Her mother faints ; the King rises and leaves.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE SEARCH.

Alas ! that ever we were wroughte !
That we shoulde come into this place !
We were in joye, nowe we be naughte.
Alas, we have forfeited our grace.

—*Primus Demon—Chester Plays.*

“AH !” said the Prior, reproachfully to himself, wringing his hands, “this all comes of our not having carried out strictly the rules of our beloved Founder. I was anxious to please His Majesty the King. I was over-persuaded by that fool Gresford to bring Ida into the Priory !” Stamping his foot on the ground he said loudly, “I solemnly declare that no woman shall ever enter this sacred House again. A woman was the cause of the fall of the first man, and now is the Priory fallen altogether.”

It soon became known that Ida was missing, and that the play had been stopped ; excitement was everywhere. Porter West was summoned to attend before the brethren.

“Didst thou not see the girl go out ?” shouted the Prior.

“No, my Lord, I did not,” was the reply, “and, by St. Christopher, that’s the plain truth.”

“If she did not go through the Priory gate where is she and how did she get away ?”

“Now let’s think a bit,” said the Porter. “I know she was very anxious to take part in the play, for she told me

so, and she wanted to see the King. I canna think she has gone quietly or by hersel. Hast noticed if anybody else be gone too ? ”

The brethren looked at each other surprised that a suggestion of such a character should be made. They were all members of the ark of St. Augustine and therefore above suspicion. Yet what flock is without one black sheep. Someone suggested Porter West might possibly have received what we call “a tip,” remembering himself that such a thing had been paid and accepted, and by West himself.

Suddenly, Brother John, struggling manfully with emotion, cried out : “ Where is Brother Kingston ? ”

“ Oh ! ” said another brother, “ he was in the stable taking the part of one of the asses. I saw the ass lying down, and ’pon my word he didn’t look as if he had had any fat venison for more than a year.”

“ Aye, perhaps thou wert lying by his side,” whispered Porter West.

“ No, no, I was in the nave, standing near Sir Barny, who, ’pon my soul, didn’t look at all comfortable or happy. He were twitching all over, so much so that he had to leave, as he told me, to get a drink of the Priory’s brew.”

“ Aye, aye,” said Brother John, “ this be all very fine, but I asked not where Brother Kingston was, but where is he now ? ”

The brother was missing.

Search was made everywhere, but no trace of him could be found. Porter West declared he had not left by the Priory gate. Noticing the curious, suspicious looks of the monks, he pulled all his keys and everything else out of his pockets as though to prove that Ida was not there, but

really to show everyone that no "tips" had been received that way. The chamber formerly occupied by Ida was carefully examined. Her home clothes were there, as also the little rushen cradle with the waxen figure of the Holy Babe, lying snugly on the floor. Her mother was sent for to complete the search; the poor woman was half dead with fright and consternation. Wringing her hands she was calling out wildly, "Ida, Ida, do come, do come." There was no reply. She picked up the poor girl's clothing and tried to bury her face, her tears and her sorrow, in the last little relic of her dear one. Her anguish was so great that even the monks' rugged natures were subdued. Was there no trace? Were there no marks of violence? Every nook was searched: there was not a scratch or a blood-stain. Lifting up the waxen image to fondle it, as though it were of her own flesh and blood, she noticed in the little cradle a piece of paper or parchment. She seized hold of it and, by means of the dim light, Brother John read out this triplet:

"If force should me o'erpower,
Search for little Daisy flower,
In Vale Royal's belfry tower."

Drowning men catch at straws. Untrained minds do not stop to think. Those were not the days of wireless telegraphy and telephones. The men of the Hundred must be summoned, and were they not already waiting impatiently at the Priory gate ready to do anything to find poor Ida. Did they not all know and love the child who by her industry and exertion had under most disadvantageous circumstances done all a maiden of tender years could to keep the cottage home together? Had she not been wistfully looked at by all the country swains, and

had she not told every one of them that her first duty was to her sorrowing mother—yet here was a clue of some sort. How could Ida know that force was intended to be used: had she overheard some intended threat: if she did know why had she not told someone—her mother—Brother John, or the Prior himself? Was it her own writing or had someone else concocted the message and, if so, for what purpose? How had she escaped? These and many other thoughts troubled the whole of the brethren. They too were ashamed to think that one of their own brethren was absent. Why was he away? Whatever did the rhyme mean by “little Daisy flower”? How could it be intended for Ida? Only Brother John knew: he saw at once that Brother Kingston and Sir Barnaby must have had a hand in this affair.

Vale Royal was distant from Norton Priory some fifteen miles by road, and the nearest route lay through rough country to the Salt Town of Northwich, and thence along the old Watling Street to the Abbey. On horseback in the day time it would take at least four or five hours, and at night across some of the open commons and lands it would be most dangerous travelling. Roads then were mere tracks, of no special width, indicated largely by sludge some five or six inches deep where the horses and wagons jolted along. There was not even a hedge or fence by the side. The King and his retinue had returned to Halton disappointed and dissatisfied: they had taken all their horses with them. Some of His Majesty's courtiers had insisted on excusing themselves on the ground that most of the animals were wearied with the day's hunting and could not be spared to search for a country wench. She ought to have taken better care of herself: like every other

woman, she had got a tongue in her mouth, and they had not the slightest doubt she would use it. They had enough trouble looking after a King : and he was now sure to be in a terrible temper ; why should they trouble about the loss of a lass ?

There was therefore only left the one old broken-down hack of the Priory. A messenger was, however, despatched to Halton to inform the King of the enigmatic riddle which had been discovered, and praying for help. In the meantime, and so as to avoid possible delay, Brother John bravely determined to mount the Priory hack and set off alone on that long, difficult and dangerous journey to Vale Royal in search of " the daisy flower."

A Canon of the Order of St. Augustine, he must not be armed. He stuck some victuals in the saddle bags and something too for the horse right across the pommel of the saddle. He looked at the country clouts round the Priory gate : he looked at the stars above, for he had a good knowledge of astronomy and guessed that he would find his way somehow. The brethren came out to give him cheer : the Prior bade him God speed, and, soon, getting along as quickly as he could, he left the followers behind and was trotting pensively and alone. His heart was sad : had he not promised Ida's mother that no harm should befall the child : did he not vow he would be a sun to the daisy ? On, on he went—now by the dark woods of Dutton then by the banks of the Weaver : not a light to cheer—not a soul to bless. Presently there were signs of an approaching storm : the wind increased ; clouds covered his beacon stars and rain came down, just at first in drops, then in torrents. He sought to take temporary shelter under one of the great oak trees then common in the

country; he had only done some six miles of this weary road in some two hours time. Midnight was approaching: he was drenched: his clothes were sodden, but his heart was brave: he would soon be near Dutton Hall, the ancestral seat of Sir Peter de Dutton, and although Sir Peter was with the King, he felt sure some of the retainers would give him hospitality, and another horse, and so he would do the remainder of the journey more quickly. He dismounted so as to shake the wet from his long cloak and to get to the oaten bread he had packed in the saddle bags. Suddenly he started: he thought he heard a movement in the thick brambles and bushes close by. He listened and looked: two men appeared.

"Hey, ho! Brother John, where be the sun this dark night, and where be the daisy flower? Is this the way to Vale Royal's belfry tower?"

John saw at once he had to meet his two rivals, Brother Kingston and Sir Barnaby.

"You, Kingston, can tell me where the daisy is: from you, Gresford, I claim the King's protection," replied John.

"The King's protection! Oh, aye, we protect all His Majesty's subjects alike, particularly country lasses from the kisses of monks and canons," said Sir Barnaby.

"Hey, ho!" called out Kingston; "the laws of St. Augustine, Brother John, must be observed as well as the laws of our good king: thou art bound by both, and if thou breakest either, Sir Barny must see the penalty is enforced in the King's name."

"Aye," said Sir Barny, "why not make thyself comfortable? If thou wouldest hasten to Vale Royal, may we favour thee with our distinguished company? If thy sun hath gone down, prithee, let ours shine."

"I decline thy company as much as I despise thy presence. I will proceed on my journey without troubling either of you," said John.

"Oh," said Kingston, "we are too fond of thee to let thee go: we would have thee with us whether thou wishest or not."

"Then I will not go. I am on my way to find Ida Godman, now at Vale Royal, and thither I intend to journey," said John. "I am a man of peace. I again claim the King's protection," addressing Gresford.

"This is the King's protection," said Kingston; and at once he aimed a heavy blow at John's head with a thick riding stick. John partly warded off the blow, but it fell on his shoulder and brought him to the ground near to his saddle horse.

"Quick, Barny," said Kingston, "bind him, and let's pack him on his own pack horse. Stuff the victuals and the bag all together down his throat and then he won't hear anything more of his daisy flower. There be the River Weaver close to: let him sink or swim to Vale Royal's belfry tower and see his daisy flower in that way. Beside, she bain't at Vale Royal. Our little note and the plot was well laid, eh, Barny. I wonder if thou ever didst such a trick before."

"No," replied Barny, "never, and I don't want to do it again. Kingston, thou'rt worse than the devil himself. Some of you Christian dogs will do things I shudder to think of. Do thy dirty work thyself. I return to the King. God save the King and kill thee."

The galloping of horses made them both start. It was some of the King's retinue headed by the noble Sir Peter de Dutton. They had followed quickly after Brother John,

only to find him in the hands of these two villains—one representing the Church and the other the State, whilst innocence and righteousness were being strangled by both.

“In the Name of the King, surrender!” cried out Sir Peter.



CHAPTER IX.

THE RESULT.

“God bless the King and the Heir of Dutton!”

—Acclamation anciently concluding the service in St. John the Baptist’s Church, Chester, at the annual licensing of the Cheshire Minstrels by the Lord of Dutton.

“How now, thou villain, Gresford,” cried Sir Peter; “what miscreant’s work art thou after now? Here art thou at the dead of night in these lonesome roads, in the King’s uniform, away from thy duty, which requires thee at the Castle of Halton.”

“Aye, aye, Sir Peter, right glad I am to see thee. I thought I should have been overpowered and my trusty sword snatched from me, and that by two miserable half starved monks. If thou, Sir Peter, had not come up just at that minute I should never have seen the King and thee any more. So now I have bound one and nearly had to choke him to stay his horrid tongue, which cuts as deep as any Damascus blade. See how this peace-loving monk whom they call Kingston, because he hath fits to be styled King some day, holds that horrid thick riding stick, and with which he tried to fell me to the ground!”

Kingston’s face was a picture so far as it could be seen.

“Well, Gresford, so far so good; but explain why thou art here at all, and at such an hour, and so far away from Halton, where thy duty calls.”

“Most honourable Sir Peter, I never deceived thee or

anyone else, otherwise I would not be in the King's service. Thou heardest of the disappearance of the Maid of Overton and how the play of the Nativity closed. I prayed the Prior to let her take the part of the Holy Mother, and, finding someone must have stolen and hidden her away, my conscience accused me that I had done wrong in asking the Prior to let her take the part, and I could not sleep until she were found and restored to her mother, so I thought she might have been carried to thy hospitable house near here, or possibly to the Abbey of Vale Royal. On my way to discharge this sacred mission I am waylaid by these two miscreant monks. They are both brothers of the St. Augustine order, and hail from Norton Priory. I saw both of them at Vesper time just when the Maid was stated to have disappeared. This fellow that lies on the ground has gone mad; he called her 'his daisy,' and thought himself to be 'the sun'; the other, Kingston, was his rival, madly in love with the Maid, and what they have done with her God only knows: I pity the child and her mother."

Brother John was partly stunned by the shock of the blow he had received: his hands were tied so that he could not pull out of his mouth the bag which had been stuffed in to prevent him calling for aid. He could, however, hear Gresford's plausible story. Sir Peter was inclined to believe it. He could not imagine His Majesty's Dispenser wandering away on an unjust errand, and as for these monks, nobody on God's earth knew what they were up to.

"Kingston, so thou calls thyself, what hast thou to say?" said Sir Peter.

There was the rub: if he alleged that he was conspirator with Gresford he would confess his own guilt, and any

assertion against one of the King's servants would not be believed.

He stammered and stuttered so much about Ida that his courage failed him. Sir Peter, treating this as an acknowledgment that Gresford's story was true, ordered his men to seize Kingston, which was done, much to the delight of both John and Barny.

At last Sir Peter gave orders to unloose John, bidding him rise and speak for himself.

The story of love, of craft and ill will, of fruitless search and attack was told in plain words which appealed to Sir Peter's honest heart. Breaking away from the present picture, full of fraud and fury, Sir Peter addressed all the three of them. "Where is this Ida, this daisy, the Maid of Overton?"

Brother John was the first to answer "I would give my life to know. Bring her hither safely and soundly and thou shalt cut me down with thy knightly sword: my dying face would bear a smile to heaven to know that she is alive and well. These two know where she is: they have stolen her from me because, whether it be right or no, they knew I loved her for herself alone: they, full of hell and jealousy, wished to send her to the devil whose servants they are."

"Gresford," said Sir Peter, "what hast thou to say? When didst thou see her last?"

"I," replied Gresford, "saw her last at the Priory."

"When?" asked Sir Peter.

"Ahem—about the hour of Nones yesterday."

"And thou hast not seen her since?" said Sir Peter.

"Most certainly not," he replied. "Why should I be interested in her whereabouts? I only saw the girl about

two days ago for the first time. I have not the slightest interest in her, except to wish her no harm."

"And, Kingston, thou?" said Sir Peter.

"I am just as innocent as Sir Barnaby de Gresford. I was astonished when my Brother John told you of her escape from the Priory. Why she should leave there and not take her part in the play is to me a puzzle. Further, Sir Barnaby is mistaken if he thought either Brother John or I had the slightest intention to molest him. Didst thou, Brother John, intend to injure or interfere with Sir Barnaby?"

"No," said John, "certainly not; it was the other way about. But I beg thee to cease calling me Brother. Thou art no brother now."

Sir Peter was puzzled, and came to the conclusion that the matter required further and more careful investigation, so he ordered his followers to remount their horses and proceed with Sir Barnaby and the two monks to the Abbey of Vale Royal, so as to ascertain whether the report that she had been taken thither by force was true.

"Where be your horses?" demanded Sir Peter; "for, by St. Mary, whatever either of you may vouch I will not believe that both or either of you have walked this wet night by this lonesome road to so dark and dismal a spot. Who doth this horse belong to grazing as steadily as an Eastern bullock?"

"Oh, aye," cried Brother John, "that be mine which I have brought from the Priory, and the only one which could be spared on such an errand."

"Nay, by the Holy Mother, that be mine," said Sir Barny.

"What!" demanded Sir Peter, "this one of the King's

horses! His Majesty would be ashamed to own such a beast: more fit for a knacker's yard than the King's stables. Let's examine him to see if he bears the royal mark, and the saddle too. Wigram, do thou look and see."

One of the retinue examined the animal, and the saddle, and pronounced that neither had ever done service for the King, and never would do. Moreover, he had seen the horse in the Norton stables that afternoon.

This convinced Sir Peter that Brother John was telling the truth, and that Sir Barny was not.

"Lash 'em both to your horse's tail and let them both walk that way. John, do thou mount thy own steed and follow us as best thou canst. Perhaps we shall find thee a change at Dutton Hall."

Barny and Kingston were both seized, so as to carry out Sir Peter's orders, but before it was actually executed, Barny gave a shrill whistle, and presently two riderless horses came galloping up ready saddled.

"Aye, aye," said Wigram, "these be His Majesty's and no mistake, besides, look: there be the Crown stamped upon the saddle. Why these be Nero and Leander which were missing when we started out. And see, one be a pillion saddle: what be that for, when no lady be about?"

"Aye," said Barny, "our usual luck. Nero and Leander, knowing the straits we were in, must have followed your pack and just have come up in the nick of time. Wigram, thou must have brought a woman with thee, otherwise Leander would ne'er have turned out with that pillion."

"Me a woman!" said Wigram. "No such fortune; and if I had, she would not have long been with me, if thou hadst been there, Sir Barny."

"Now, now," said Sir Peter, "this is all done to waste time. Our duty carries us to Vale Royal belfry tower without delay to rescue the fairest and best of all women. Kingston and Gresford, mount your steeds, and take places as prisoners in the centre surrounded by the guard, and cease your chatter. The devil himself never had such a sugar-coated tongue inside of a lying mouth. Quick! Up and no delay."

They were all mounted and the cavalcade was about to start with Sir Peter at the head, as he knew every inch of the way. The rain had ceased; the stars were beginning to shine again. Brother John's sad heart was somewhat lightened by the happy results which had tended so favourably to himself and confirmed the story he had told. Sir Peter was puzzled, as were all his retinue. If Ida had got to Vale Royal how had she been taken there so quickly? If Kingston and Gresford were in the plot and had been the cause of her removal, why were they here, with much more than half the journey to Vale Royal still to travel? John's mind was disturbed and his eyes wandered. And presently he called out loudly and wildly: "Oh, Sir Peter, Sir Peter! what be that white thing in the wood like someone lying down?"

"What white thing, John?" said Sir Peter, "I shall think now thou art troubled with a disordered brain."

"See there, see there," said John, "a distance away in the direction where the King's horses came from."

"Aye, aye, the ghost of these Dutton Woods perhaps sleeping, or pretending to sleep because she knows the owner of Dutton Hall be hereabouts. I have heard a lot about her—let's see if it be real or moonshine." He instantly discharged a firelock. Aye! see the ghost rises,

disturbed : clasping her hands wildly, then up towards the stars above, a woman's voice screeched out "John, John !" and the ghost fell down.

One at least there was who knew that voice again. Two there were who wished they had never heard it.

Brother John was the first out of the saddle. He feared no ghost. Rushing headlong over the brambles and under-wood, breathless he climbed the little embankment and placing his arm underneath her head, he just whispered "Ida, Ida."

There was no response.



CHAPTER X.

HALTON CASTLE.

Their swords are rust,
Their bones are dust,
Their souls are with the saints we trust.

It was early morning, and the sun was just beginning to break out, dispelling the early mists. High up above, rose the Hill and Castle of Halton with the flag of St. George of England proudly floating from its loftiest turret betokening the presence of His Majesty the King. The early wood fires were sending up the blue curling smoke. To the north-west was the broad estuary of the Mersey with a small fleet of sailing ships tacking their sails, or under anchor, discharging provisions and goods for the King. South, east and west was the wide Cheshire plain, undulating, yet shrouded with pasture, peace and plenty. Here and there were the woods with oak, ash and elm, almost bare of leaves, which, fallen, formed a carpet of brown covering, with the giant stalks of the forest pointing to the cloudless sky above. Further on in the western background were the Overton Hills, with their natural escarpment of rock descending right into the valley, and slowly meandering through the meadows was the Weaver, fresh and brown, with the muddy waters of the upper reaches tearing down in bubbling foam and froth to join the greater Mersey.



F. Ball, Photographer, Runcorn.

Alf Cooke, Ltd., Leeds & London.

The last window in the old ruins at
Galton, which dates back to the 12th
century.

The sentries posted round the Castle and at the various gates and entrances were yawning and waiting for the change of guard, which would relieve them of the hours of night-duty they had just performed. Right as far as one could see was the budding village of Liverpool, and on beyond, the estuary and the rough Irish Sea then unconquered by steam and steel. A cavalcade of horsemen is seen to be approaching the Castle, and the Captain of the Guard, ever on the alert, particularly when His Majesty's sacred presence required special attention, casts a keen glance in the direction of the new comers with a view of ascertaining their numbers and meaning.

A sharp order of attention brings the guard to a sense of official duty: firelocks (only just served out to the King's guard), bows, strings and equipments are examined and placed ready for any urgent requirements. The fine physique of the men entrusted with this important duty is noticeable: the sun shines upon their bright armour and brighter helmets, whilst, here and there, a nodding plume blows with the wind. A sharp look-out is kept all round: horses are saddled ready for any emergency. The look-out on the central tower is doubled and signals made to the advanced guard and outposts, to communicate the first intelligence of whether the new comers be friends or foes.

News at that period in our history travelled slowly, and in the absence of beacon fires on the hills, little was known of an approaching enemy until within easy marching distance. The Captain of the advanced guard soon, however, showed a white flag, and this was the first intimation that friends were on their way to the Castle. Soon the soldierly form, armour and plumes of the Knight of Dutton Hall were distinguishable on his well-known grey charger,

followed by the retinue on horseback which, despatched in search of the Maid of Overton, had left the Castle the previous evening. In the centre were noticeable the King's horses, Nero and Leander, neighing fond welcomes to old quarters. Leander was, however, mounted by someone, not in the King's service, and behind the rider sat a lady dressed in white, strapped closely and tightly to the black costumed figure in front. Her head was bent, with chin almost touching her breast; her face white like the sails of ships on the river, but as motionless as the stolid stones of the battlement. Her pale hands hung loosely down, apparently lifeless. Behind the prancing Leander were Nero and an ambling palfrey, on which were seated, yet chained together, one figure in the King's uniform, and the other covered with a black gown, under which could be noticed parts of a white cassock. All were splashed with the brown mud of the country fields and lanes; all looked jaded, tired and hungry, yet the warm welcome which was extended in the Castle yard was a relief, especially when high glee seemed to mellow the hard faces, betokening satisfaction with the evident success of the night expedition.

The brawny, tawny arms and hands of the guard soon unravelled the leathern thongs and ties which bound the helpless Ida to her protector and deliverer, John of Norton, and hands of steel became gloves of velvet, whilst fondly and gently lifting her from the pillion and laying her softly on the patch of green grass in the courtyard. Just two eyes opened to look at John; just two lips seemed to say "John," and she could see written on his face and on his lips and everywhere "Ida." The sweet exchange of smiles showed life and love. What cared he for more?

She was safe! He took off his black gown, revealing his white cassock, cape and hood, and lifting her head he placed them beneath as a soft support. She was not only tired and weary, but the shock attendant upon her capture and discovery had rendered her speechless. She, however, saw the two chained prisoners on horseback. Her look was sufficient to send terror into their hearts, and as far as their unfortunate position permitted, they turned away their glances. Barny and Kingston were just as unhappy as John was happy. Their two faces were full of dark, dismal scowls; his was lighted with sweet smiles which hid a warm heart. Ida did not—could not—speak, but her horror of these two wretches showed that, when she had recovered, she could tell a story which, in those days of chivalry, would tighten the soldier's grip of his lance and nerve him to dash with unquenchable zeal and fury against such miscreants.

"Zounds! where be these two wretches?" called Sir Peter. "Unchain them and let them dismount and take them to the Castle dungeon, there to await His Majesty's commands. Give 'em no sack and plenty of rope."

"Aye, aye," replied the Captain of the Guard, "but I see, Sir Peter, that one of these men be Sir Barny de Gresford, the King's Provider. Hath he to be taken charge of?"

"By heavens! yes," replied Sir Peter; "both are as bad as they can be. The one was duly enrolled in the service of the King of England, sworn to protect all His Majesty's liege subjects, and in particular the Maid of Overton—the other professeth to be of the army of the King of Heaven, and weareth uniform which shows him to be a wolf in sheep's clothing. Give 'em both the deepest dungeon and

let 'em think over their trial by ordeal, which must follow shortly as the King may decide. As for this tender child, send for some of the serving women and let them give her the best chamber which is at liberty in that part of the castle reserved for the Queen's Maids of Honour."

Soon Gresford and Kingston were hustled into chains, and, without a murmur, led by ready hands and stout arms to the back yard of the castle, thence by a circular stone staircase down innumerable narrow steps to the oaken door studded with iron nails, which was the entrance to the Castle dungeon, in which they were to be lodged pending the King's pleasure. "Curse thee, Kingston," said Gresford; "one cannot touch a praying priest without daubing oneself with pitch. I would like to fight thee—and kill thee, and were it not for these manacles and chains I would do it now."

He rushed at Kingston with all the fury of a man mad with hate, knocked him down on the dungeon floor, and would have stamped him to death with his feet had not the guard intervened and pulled him away, pricking Gresford with the point of his sword.

"Gresford, thou art a fool," called Kingston; "what have I done? It was thee who suggested the plot. I was simply thy miserable tool in assisting thee to carry it out, and thy curse and blow is what I get for my pains and trouble. The Devil's pay—a kick and a cuff, and hell afterwards."

"Aye, monk," said Gresford, "thou must begin thy preaching. Thou forgettest that if thou hadst not shown me the way to the Maid's little chamber at the Priory, dressed in the monkish cloak thou lent me, yon Maid would

never have been touched and taken away. Who wrote out the false triplet?

“If force should me o’erpower,
Search for little Daisy flower
In Vale Royal’s belfry tower.”

Was it not thine own devilish suggestion to put them on the wrong scent?—the scheme of a meddling, muddling monk. Let us both see daylight once more, and I will cure all thy little tricks.”

“Prating Provider,” said Kingston, “think what would have happened to that poor Maid had I not accompanied thee. Seeing what thou wert determined upon, knowing my power, and how even my word would be believed against thine, didst not guess that, though to blame, I went with thee to see that no harm should overtake her? Thy soldier’s garb can hit hard—my white cassock can cut deep.”

“Cease thy pother, and hold thy arrant tongue,” replied Gresford. “Sermons I cannot preach; lies I may not teach. Thou art an ignorant man; ignorant of a King’s ways, and how he desireth his Court to be adorned with the most beautiful of his subjects. If I receive a command I execute it, and so dost thou. The King can do no wrong. There is my excuse, and of that defence thou hast no avail, since thy actions were governed and tempered by no such order or inspiration. Thy object I know quite well was, whilst I slept, thou wouldst have kidnapped the girl out of my sight, but with my presence that could not be for long.”

“Aye, aye,” said Kingston, “then thou sayest that the King ordered thee to do this wrong. Art adding treason and traitor to thy present good character? Art desirous of obtaining His Majesty’s pleasure by conjuring up a

story that this capture was done for his sake? I may inform the King of a few facts which do not fit in with that impeachment of his honour."

The guard, now hearing the name of His Majesty introduced, and his good fame abused, ordered the talk to cease, adding: "The King will decide for himself which to believe, and both of you will have plenty of time to reflect upon his judgment."

Let us now go to a brighter scene, where the Maid of Overton—the little daisy—sleeps safely, sweetly and soundly. The chamber where she lay had a small window, or loophole, closed with a square of thin horn. It was situate at the top of the Central Tower, and had little else by way of furniture except a very large fourposter bed with tapestry curtains, a box in which clothes were kept and which also served as a seat, and a prie-dieu chair which, as usual, contained prayer and other devotional manuscripts. The walls were hung with tapestry, some representing groves with cattle; others, heroes of ancient history or events in the romance of chivalry. The floor was paved with hard stone, which was then carefully covered with straw instead of scented herbs as in the summer. But, sweeter than all was one face seated near the bedside—anxiously looking and watching for the slightest movement—a look full of pure love and tender pity. It was Ida's mother.

Brother John had carried Ida up the hard stone stairs, as carefully and gently as if she had been a new-born babe, and had left her in charge of one of the waiting maids, who promised every personal attention and devotion. He then rushed off on Leander's back on a wild gallop to Ida's home. There was the mother, almost afraid to look to

see who it was, her eyes swollen with tears and her face full of anguish.

“Oh, John, John! where is Ida—my Ida, my dearest Ida? You promised to look after her and bring her home safely.”

Seeing, however, his somewhat contented smile, before he could speak a word, she swooned away. The distress and surprise of her other children, who had now congregated round, may be imagined. A few handfuls of water from the well, and the wiping of her face with a cloth steeped in rosemary, soon revived her, and enabled John to tell the short details of the story, and how that he had come to fetch her to see Ida. He safely secured her on the pillion saddle behind him, and she clung so tenaciously to poor John that he found it difficult to breathe. Who can picture the delight of such a mother, or feel the frantic joy of such a relief? Who shall describe the first look—who tell of the soft, tender kiss, printed so lovingly on the sleeping daughter’s lips? There was just a “Thank God for this;” there was just a big sigh of relief, a little tiny raindrop, and then a shower of tears.

Still she sleeps—so very tired and weary with a day full of excitement—a night full of painful fear.

The military trumpet sounds in the courtyard below, heralding the approach of the King, followed by the clang of arms and armour, and then the lusty cheers of the stalwart men, as His Majesty descends the steps leading from the castle door.

Ida awakes—just opens her eyes—to see her dear mother once more: just two little words—“Mother,” “Ida.”

CHAPTER XI.

THE TRIAL.

"There is some cloud on every landscape, some mildew on every flower."

"How now! Sir Peter," said His Majesty; "what luck with thy expedition last night? Hast found the Virgin, or why dost thou return without executing my command that she be discovered?"

"Your most excellent Majesty," replied Sir Peter, "the Maid now sleeps under the roof of your Castle of Halton, as also two prisoners who are not quite so comfortable in the lower apartments and who await your Majesty's pleasure."

Sir Peter then, at the King's request, related the whole story, adding the necessary emphasis required to throw light and glamour upon the success of the expedition.

"Where be the miscreants? Bring them hither;" and forthwith Gresford and Kingston were placed in the King's presence, before whom, so far as their chains would permit, they knelt and bowed with their faces to the ground.

"Sir Peter, do thou relate once more the interesting story thou hast just told me, so that these worthy people may hear a correct account of their good deeds."

This done, the King asked Gresford what he had to say.

"Your Majesty pleases," he said, "this monk Kingston confessed his love for the Maid, and inasmuch as he was located at the Priory, and the Maid also, I thought it safer

and wiser, in your Majesty's name and on your Majesty's behalf, solely for her protection, to remove her from such a dangerous place: all which I did, knowing that your Majesty would wish that safety should be afforded to all your Majesty's weak subjects."

"If that tale be true," said the King, "why not have brought her under armed escort to the Castle, which is but a short distance away from the Priory, rather than take her to the dark woods and forests round my Knight of Dutton's estate? Further, if thou hadst just cause of suspicion against the monk, why not have handed him over to my Justices rather than have let him accompany thee and the Maid?"

"Oh, your Majesty, be pleased to know that she be only a young girl, and she would naturally and properly object to an armed escort, thinking some wrong might be done her."

"Miscreant!" said the King, frowning, "is it not writ that in the multitude of counsellors there be safety? Thy deed speaketh for itself, and thy words only intensify the meaning of thy actions." Gresford was attempting to reply, when the King called out loudly, "Stand down."

"Now, Kingston," said the King, "what hast thou to say for thyself? Thy order is credited with trying to speak the truth, but methinks ye oftentimes fare badly in that same quest when thou art sore-pressed."

"Your most gracious and excellent Majesty," began Kingston with oily tongue, "I will tell the truth. I admit quite frankly I loved the girl, although I saw my love was not returned by her: this made me all the more anxious to succeed. Gresford it was who conceived the idea of taking her away, to which I solemnly objected, but he

assured me that he was acting under your most gracious Majesty's commands. I therefore humbly thought it my duty, as your excellent Majesty has most wisely said, to see that the Maid was carefully provided for and looked after, and for that purpose I thought it necessary that I should accompany her until she should be actually delivered to your Majesty's own person."

The King was enraged at such a speech, accusing him of suggested complicity in their wicked designs, but, with courtly bearing, he ordered the inquiry to be adjourned for two days, so that the Maid herself might be well enough to attend and give her own statement.

"Chain them," said the monarch, "back to back so that, Janus like, they, like their own words, face both ways. Ply them with food and drink as much as they can gorge, so will we satisfy their lusty instincts. Find out the strongest lances and the stoutest mail: have Nero and Leander ready saddled immediately this adjourned trial be concluded."

"Long live the King! Long live the King!" was shouted by the soldiers, until the courtyard and Castle were full of wild huzzas.

The decision and the evidence given was, by the King's wise command, not communicated to Ida, who feared that it might delay the progress of her recovery. With careful attention, however, and a mother's love, she was, in two days' time, sufficiently recovered to see—as she was bid—the King of England.

Seated on a chair with her mother on one side and John on the other, she was brought into the courtyard a short time prior to the arrival of the King, as also the two prisoners, who had not done credit to the extra attention

which by His Majesty's command had been given to them. On the King's arrival all, except Ida, stood, and she was still too weak to do so.

"Maid," said the King, "I have had thee brought from thy chamber, in the hope that this beautiful fresh air coming from the Overton Hills might revive thee and give thee thy former life and vigour, as also that, in thy simple way, thou mightest tell me and this Court, in the presence of these two men, how thou wert taken from the Priory the night of the Miracle Play—and what became of thee. Speak and be not afraid."

"Oh, King," said Ida, "I really fear to tell thee all that happened: it seems so long ago, and my poor brain has become so distracted with my recent sufferings, that these two ——!"

Here poor Ida burst into tears and her mother and John had much trouble in quieting her, but ultimately they succeeded, and she became more calm and collected than usual, for John had gently made her sip a small draught which he knew would assuage her feelings.

"Now Ida, for that I think is thy name," said the King soothingly, "do not fear these men, or indeed anyone present. We are here to administer justice and will see that no wrong overtake thee. These men have alleged that they both wished to protect and look after thee most carefully, so that no harm should befall thee. Be that true or not?"

"King," said Ida with greater courage, "they wished to look after me! How can that be? I told them both I did not want to go with them. I struggled and objected. I shouted, but they stuffed the Virgin's raiment in my mouth."

“ Ah, Ida,” said the King, “ where did they find thee first ? ”

“ Oh, King, I was waiting in the little chamber of the Priory, where I had dressed to take part in the Miracle Play, when someone knocked quietly on the door, and when I opened it that man Gresford came in, caught hold of me, and attempted to kiss me, but I would not. He said ‘ Come and see the King ; he wants thee,’ and I, knowing he was in thy service, followed him into the Cloister, thinking I should see the King there. He then pulled me up a ladder by force over the high courtyard wall, and on the other side was another ladder, and that monk Kingston, being on the other side, seized me and pulled me down most rudely. There were two horses there. I shouted, but they stuffed and covered my mouth so that I had no speech : they strapped me behind Gresford and put a cloak right over me so that no one could tell I was there. They walked the horses quietly for a bit, and then when they got a short distance they galloped away and I was near falling all the time. See the marks on my arms where they got hold of me so roughly as never was”—and here Ida showed the black flesh, proving that great violence must have been used.

Kingston and Gresford looked daggers. John and Ida’s mother were overcome almost to tears.

“ What sayest thou, Gresford ? ” sternly demanded King Edward ; “ and remember thou wert in my service and bound to protect the weak.”

Gresford advanced two steps, assumed a military air, and then making a low bow said, “ Your most excellent Majesty, what the Maid sayeth seemeth against me. I admit all she alleges, and yet, I again repeat I did all for

the best. Why, sire, if I did try to kiss her, who could help it? That is the best proof that I never intended any harm. It is true that there are some marks, but those must have been done by that monk Kingston. He was the devil and I was the—the—the——”

“Saint,” said his Majesty ironically.

“Yes, your Majesty, for want of a better word,” said Gresford. “I did the Maid no harm. I would not do. I could not do. I am prepared to lay down my life for her now, so your Majesty pleases.”

“Perhaps you will have the chance,” said the King, indicating what was passing through his judicial mind. “Well now,” he continued, “let us hear what the devil has got to say.”

Kingston, responding to the invitation, also advanced to the side of Gresford and with wily tongue stated his case. “Devil I may be to this wicked man, who judgeth all men by his secular and pernicious principles, and doth not even spare those whose lives should be protected from his venom, by reason of the garb they wear and the vows they have taken. I, as the Maid admits, was on the outer side of the Priory wall. Gresford, this wicked man, had assured me the Maid did not wish, and indeed that she objected to taking the part of the Virgin in the Miracle Play. Therefore, in order to escape the public gaze, she was quite willing to leave the Priory quietly, and quite voluntarily; further that she was so acting in accordance with your most gracious Majesty’s wishes. To test the truth of these statements I declined to go to the Maid’s chamber and preferred to wait outside. I thought if the Maid climbed over the wall, it would be the best proof that she really did wish to escape, and, as I previously stated to

you, sire, if she had to leave the Priory I thought it my sacred and natural duty to accompany her to see that no harm befell her. By St. Mary ! I did her no violence, and these marks were caused before she came into my hands. I love her too well ever to permit her to sustain the slightest injury."

"Hadst thou ever inquired," demanded the King, "if the Maid returned thy love?"

"Aye, your Majesty, that I did, and I satisfied myself I could gain the Maid's love."

There was a look of consternation all round. Ida was full of excitement, and desired to interpose, but His Majesty would not allow the proceedings of his court to be interfered with, and bade that she should be removed now that she had made her statement. This created an impression that His Majesty was somewhat influenced by Kingston's speech and was considering the question of whether the girl's actions were in entire accord with her statement.

The King then addressed Kingston: "What proof hast thou which satisfied thee that the Maid would love thee?"

"Well, your Majesty," replied Kingston, "when she had gotten over the wall and saw me, she jumped into my arms, and as she fell, I felt quite certain her face came against mine, and I am sure I—I—kissed her, which is more than that wicked man Gresford can ever say."

His Majesty now having heard the evidence on all sides, ordered the proceedings to be adjourned for an hour so that he might consider what the judgment should be.

King Edward II., who had himself taken the trouble to hear and decide this matter personally, was a monarch with few good qualities. His reign commenced on the

death of his father, the first Edward, in the year 1307, who had been privileged to hold the throne thirty-five years. The historian Green says of the reign of the first Edward, who laid the foundation stone of Vale Royal: "It was an age of lawyers. The most illustrious men of the time were no longer such as Bacon or Earl Simon, or Francis of Assisi, but men such as St. Louis of France or Alfonso, the wise organisers, administrators, framers of laws and institutions. It was to this class that Edward the First himself belonged. He had little of creative genius or political originality in his character, but he possessed in a high degree the faculty of organisation, and his passionate love of law broke out even in the legal chicanery to which he sometimes stooped. In the judicial reforms to which so much of his attention was directed he showed himself, if not an English *Justinian*, at any rate a clear sighted man of business, developing, reforming, bringing into a lasting shape the institutions of his predecessors. One of his first cares was to complete the judicial reforms begun by Henry II. The Courts of King's Bench, Exchequer, and Common Pleas now received a distinct staff of Judges for each court. The Judges, thus severed from the Council, retained the name and the ordinary jurisdiction of 'The King's Courts,' while all cases in which the Judges failed to do justice were reserved for the special cognizance of the Royal Council itself. To this final jurisdiction of the King in Council Edward I. gave a wide development. It is to the same social revolution as well as to the large statesmanship of Edward the First that we owe our Parliament."

One would have thought that so able a father would have been succeeded by an equally worthy and able son.

Edward the Second had some good qualities, but "morally he was worthless," still he was "far from destitute of the intellectual power which seemed hereditary in the Plantagenets. It was his settled purpose to fling off the yoke of the baronage and the means by which he designed to accomplish his purpose was the choice of a Minister wholly dependent on the Crown." For this purpose his first act was to recall and appoint "the gay, genial and flippant" Gaveston, a foreigner, to be Earl of Cornwall and to place him at the head of his administration. The older Ministers were dismissed, all claims of precedence or inheritance set aside in the distribution of offices at the Coronation, while taunts and defiances goaded the proud baronage to fury. In a few months the power of the Parliament was once more supreme and Gaveston dismissed. The barons found a head in the Earl of Lancaster, the memory of whose martyrdom the King had visited Lancashire and Cheshire for the express purpose of eradicating.

It was to this same Edward that Ida had to look for justice, and Kingston and Gresford for mercy or punishment. Edward was supreme: he had all the powers and jurisdiction of his Chancellor and the King's Court. That "the King can do no wrong" was most solemnly believed and acted upon. It was no proverbial phrase; it was the gospel of the Government. There was still in force in those days the knight-errant, "who was usually some young knight, lately dubbed, and who, full of courage and tired of the monotony of his father's manor house, set out in search of adventures. We could envy him as, on some bright spring morning, he rode across the sounding draw-bridge, followed by a squire, in the person of a young

forester, as full of animal spirits and reckless courage as himself; or, perhaps, by some steady old warrior, practised in the last French war, whom his father had chosen to take care of him. A knight was known to be a knight-errant by his riding through the peaceful country in full armour, with a single squire at his back, as surely as the man is now recognized as a fox hunter who is seen riding easily along the strip of green sward by the roadside in a pink coat and velvet cap. A knight in quest of adventures would sometimes station himself at a ford or bridge and mount guard all day long and let no knight-errant pass until he had jousted him."

It was with his semi-legal and constructive mind that the King was walking to and fro over the tilting ground attached to the Castle at Halton. He wanted to arrive at the truth. He did not believe the story told by De Gresford and Kingston: he felt sure that, like most prisoners on trial, they could not be trusted to speak the truth; yet he wondered why the Maid did not call out loud enough to make someone in the Priory hear of the violence used, unless she were a party or in some way consenting to what had occurred. He had not seen the Maid before, and knew nothing of her gentle and loving disposition. The question revolved in his mind again and again "Did she resist?" "Was she flattered that two men were quarrelling about her?" He knew nothing of John's love, and, if he had known, it might only have made his opinion of Ida worse than it really was, for then he would have known she was loving simply another monk, and the monk loving her, which monastic regulations said should not be. His Majesty sat himself down on one of the stone seats of the battlement walls, looking towards the great

River Mersey, and the fresh air and sunshine of those autumnal days spreading over the landscape, helped him to think more clearly. The pastoral scene is only disturbed by the view in the distance of one of those wild knight-errants; the gambols of an armour-clad youth full of vigour and life, with his attendant squire, command the King's attention. Suddenly he rises, and, speaking to himself, while his face glistens with pleasure, the words escape, "Aye, aye, that will do." He had evidently arrived at some conclusion satisfactory to himself; so he proceeded to the courtyard and directed that the prisoners and Ida should be brought before him. There was not much to commend any of the three to His Majesty: all seemed pale and woebegone. Ida's lips were quivering with fright, and the two prisoners with shame—shame both for their actions and their words. Silence was commanded whilst His Majesty delivered the following judgment:

"De Gresford, thou wert in my service; Kingston, thou hadst taken sacred vows, one of which commanded thee to refrain from unnecessary speech with woman. Both of you admit the Maid's story, but qualify her statement by alleging she was a consenting party. As to this there is a doubt. You each of you allege you love the Maid, and as there is some evidence that she is not averse to either of you, my judgment is that you each, by moonlight this very night, fight a joust together in boats which will be provided on my River Mersey, the joust to continue till one of you be killed or drowned, and that the Maid do marry the survivor. Appoint your own backers and savers. I will be present myself to see the joust is fairly and honourably carried out. Take them all away."

CHAPTER XII.

THE MOONLIGHT JOUST.

“So justice, while she winks at crimes,
Stumbles on innocence sometimes.”

—Butler—“*Hudibras*.”

SCARCE had the acclamations of the Court with its military respect concluded by wild shouts of “Long live King Edward!” before attention was directed to the persons most interested. Ida and her friends knew not whether to take the decision as a reflection upon herself. If carried out, she knew it would certainly be a punishment to death. Her pale face, marked with the tears of excitement and suffering of the last few days, now became paler: she stretched out her hands above her head, she brought them down suddenly to cover a face beautiful in its outline, even under those distressing circumstances, and, as the tears welled forth, her anguish became extreme: sob followed sob as though her heart would break. She knew that she was not guilty of the vile and false insinuations which had been made. She knew that she had been dragged from the Cloister Court over the Priory wall, strapped to De Gresford and forcibly carried away. She alone knew that there was not an atom of love in her heart for those two fellows, who, to shield themselves, had falsely added statements that she was an accomplice in the escape. The difficulty was to prove her innocence, and, even if she did, would the King relent and alter that part of his judgment

which consigned her to a life of artful tyranny and misery ? Bursting into speech, induced by the terrible strain, she flung herself on the grass of the courtyard and called out wildly "No, I never will ! I will die first !" But the King and his Court had gone, otherwise they must have seen that the decision was wrong, at least so far as Ida herself was interested. What was the good of saying and thinking "the King can do no wrong" ? He had already wronged her. He was only human : he had made a great and serious mistake. John and her mother were the sad witnesses of it all. Sooner would John have jousted with the survivor, than that the love of such an innocent girl should be entrusted to the care of either of those vile and lying prisoners. These were the "pangs and pains of love." For what love is there without some punishment ? Sometimes it is the green-eyed monster of jealousy ; often it is a little misunderstanding, followed by a queenly pride, which will not suffer the humiliation of asking for, or listening to, an explanation ; or again it is a desire not to be too loving, for fear a spirit of independence springs up : this, mistaken for a seeming coolness, develops into a frigidity and stiffness which seeks the company of others by way of revenge. In this case an accusation of partiality had been lodged, and the King had judged that it must be decided by brute force. Did John think there was just a shade of truth in the King's suspicions ? Had Ida really resisted as much as she could have done ? He was not far away when, as she says, she was forcibly abducted. If she had only called out as loudly and strongly as his love for her expected, he would have rushed from the chancel and stopped it all, and so this present difficulty would never have occurred.

Had she really kissed Kingston? If so, having regard to his sacred vow, had he not better accept the situation, and avoid further unpleasant consequences to himself? To dispute the King's ruling might involve further trouble and pain. Was he sure she really loved him, or was her profession of love a simple passing and temporary phase, which in some women changes as often as the moon, which glows to-night and to-morrow fades and disappears? All these and many similar thoughts crowded in upon John's mind. She had fainted now: was that an acknowledgment of guilt and fear; or was it caused by the strain of an unrighteous judgment? Everything seemed to create a doubt, a false impression, cast upon a loving yet suspicious mind. John and her mother lifted Ida gently from the grass to carry her to her chamber. The maids seemed to doubt if they should assist. They looked askance; for the news soon spread all over the Castle, increasing in volume and weight every time it was repeated, that she had been willing and ready to go away with both or either of the prisoners; yet the tongue that could prove the vileness of such a suspicion was speechless. Her mother knew the truth. But then she was Ida's mother, and the world then, as now, would say that her mother was bound to side with her.

"John," she said, somewhat sharply, "why don't thou say something? Thou hast not uttered a word since this false judgment was given."

"Oh, mother," said John, "I am waiting until Ida can speak and tell us all about it; it seems like a wicked dream to me. What can I say, mother? I found her: I brought her out of their hands. What dost thou suggest I should say?"

"Say," she replied, "thou lovest her : say she has not been false to thee and me. If that be so, she did not, she could not, love either of those two."

"Oh, mother, I do love her, and that she knew full well—loved her more, perhaps, than I ought to have done: will love her until death comes to one of us, and after that too, but"—with that green-eyed monster staring him in the face—"she knows best whether she really loved me in return."

"Then, John, this be another lesson of the devil and the saint: thou be the saint, but I'll never call my Ida, my darling Ida, by any other name, although thy fine words seem to imply something worse."

"Oh, mother," said John, "don't put it that way. Bring some cold water here and some coarse bandages, and let us bring her round again so that she speak for herself."

"I thought, John," the mother replied, "that speech be silvern and silence golden : now thou valuest speech more than silence."

"Mother, I'll believe her true : I'll believe she loves me until she tells me with her own lips and her own tongue that she has changed."

"Thank the Lord, she has one friend besides her own mother."

Now they bathed her forehead and carefully and gently laid her upon the bed in the large chamber ; sip after sip of John's restorative was given : still the eyes were closed and still the tongue speechless. Then they fanned her face, unfastened all from round her neck, and waited—waited seemingly for the return of life and joy and love. Presently the eyes opened slowly to behold daylight once

more—a bewildered look—and then another look which made a beautiful picture upon the brain ; it was the picture of her mother and John, and then a kiss for each, without a word, a kiss which told more than words—a kiss which convicted two men more righteously than the King’s judgment—a kiss which sealed the fate of those two prisoners and two others—John and Ida. “John,” whispers the mother, “does she love thee : has she been false ?”

“Oh, mother,” he replied, “silence is golden. Do I not believe her to be the light and the truth, without the utterance of a single word ? That judgment shall never be carried out. I will die first.”

Ida heard it all and simply whispered “I will die with thee.” No one can picture or paint the sunshine and showers of such a love. The sky is a tiny little sphere compared with it; the ocean a bubbling brook in depth: the most distant star less fixed : the sun less warm : it ceases not with life : it suffers no decay with age, and all—all this—within those two hearts which beat in unison, wild with joy, in that chamber at the Castle of Halton !

How different the scene in another room in that same Castle. There, deep down below, but not deep enough for the hell they deserved, were Gresford and Kingston—plying their tongues, tainted with malicious venom, waiting for the arms they had to ply against each other by that evening’s moonlight. Their words were full of sound and fury which boded no good. They would have waged the battle even then, had not the guards interfered and kept them at bay. De Gresford was relying for his success on his military training and powers ; Kingston with his

sacred ideas trusting to "Dieu et mon droit." Like two caged lions, they walked to and fro at each end of the limited dungeon, each waiting for his prey and the reward he thought to have afterwards. The prize was great—the survivor should marry Ida.

The archers had received instructions from their Commander to procure two boats. Lots were drawn for boatmen and rowers, for the spirit of war prevailed, and many were eager to be partners in this aquatic tournament, seldom seen; for generally the tilting ground was used for these displays of chivalry and skill. Lances were procured for the combatants, and, in sufficient numbers, so that if any broke with the violent impact, others would be there to replace those damaged. Reserves were also assigned, in case any of the rowers were injured or drowned, but care was exercised in making the selection to engage those only who could swim. With the combatants this could not be so. Their armour would be so heavy, there was little chance for either if they should fall into the river. The King himself had decided upon tilting on the river, instead of on horseback, because the chances were about equal for each of the combatants; neither of them having had any experience in this form of combat.

Tents were erected by the shore of the great river for the use of the King and his courtiers. These were lighted up with wick candles artistically displaying the gay colours, gold, and red and green and blue. A special tent near the King's was reserved for Ida and her mother and John. Hosts of people from all the villages were to partake of the King's hospitality, and to witness the novel fight. Wedding garments were in readiness for the bride, the King having subsequently decided that the nuptial

ceremony should take place immediately on the conclusion of the fight, so that he himself could congratulate the victor, and witness the event. Marriages at that time in our history were accustomed to be performed without much ceremonial and almost anywhere and at any hour of the day or night.

The sun gradually fades away below the horizon; the daylight disappears, and with it comes that "pale orb," the moon, and also Ida's fears and troubles. Poor girl! She trembles from head to foot, as she is clothed sumptuously, but sadly, with the rich white silk garments sent by the King to decorate her for this so-called "festive occasion," but which to her mind might more fitly be termed her funeral. Soon the courtly cavalcade is formed. First the archers, with gay plumes in their helmets, each carrying a lighted torch to lead the way to the river and also to give a semblance of pomp and ceremony: four abreast they walk, and four paces apart, with military air and step. Next come the cavalry, headed by good Sir Peter de Dutton, whose mind and heart were not at rest. Now we have the King's seneschal, the courtiers, and just preceding King Edward was Ida on horseback alone, with an attendant in charge, followed by her mother riding pillion behind the troubled John. The guards of the King brought up the rear. The prisoners had been sent in advance under armed escort.

Two miles to the River: two miles of frantic joy to interested spectators, who hoped to see the double event of a fight and a wedding. Each step of those two miles was to Ida excruciating agony; each moment a year of pain. She thought of John's promise, "I will die first," and he of her own sweet response, "I will die with thee." Death

would be a relief—a pleasure—rather than marriage with either of those villains.

Soon they reached the ominous banks of the river. There stood De Gresford and Kingston, each clad in a breast-plate of mail, each carrying a shield fastened with buckles to the left hand, and a long lance in the right. Visors concealed and protected their faces. The river then, as now, was subject to strong currents and high tides, which might give an advantage to one over the other, according as he had to row with or against the current. Then, as now, a simple toss of a coin decided that Gresford's boat must row against the tide, and Kingston's with it. But so that the fight should be to the death, ropes at the slack were to be fixed to the two boats, so that the armed champions should never get too far from each other. The King himself inspected the armour and the lances, and pronounced them to be honourable and fair.

Trumpeters now sounded their horns, as an announcement that the affray was to begin. After the third blast the two boats with their respective champions were to be rowed twelve lengths from the shore, and then to face bow to bow, where the two men stood. Soon the die would be cast. Soon the Maid would be in the rude and terrible clutches of the survivor. Which would it be? Was there any choice? None!

The signal is given, and each boat leaves the shore on its mission of happiness combined with misery and death. Soon they circle round and the rowers row with double zeal, so that the blow to be delivered may be sure and effective. It is a miss. They are too far apart, and the yell of the country folk shows their disappointment.

Places are once more taken, and, at the signal, a violent

impact takes place, not only by the bumping of the boats, but by the clang of steel. Now they are in close touch, so close that lances can be used only with the greatest of skill and patience. See, one man has fallen, and the other with fury jumps into the boat to crush and kill the very life out of him. Wild cheers go up for the victor. The world always cheers success, heedless of merits. Success is safe; bad luck has no followers. This was to be a fight to the death. There was not to be any favour. The survivor alone was to have the reward. It was death or victory: death for one, victory for the other. The last blow was just on the point of being struck, when the Royal Trumpeter sounds the blast "Lay down your arms." De Gresford was the victor and knew full well the call, and with military precision, in the presence of his Royal Master, withheld the fatal stroke. The King commanded the victor and the vanquished to be brought to his tent, as also Ida, who was accompanied by John and her mother. Kingston had to be carried thither and laid upon the grass, his visor and breastplate taken off. The silver moonlight shone upon his ghastly face. "Kingston," said the King, "didst thou tell me the truth? Did the Maid go willingly or was she forced?" The royal head bent down to hear the dying words, "Your Majesty, so please these be the last words I utter, I confess I told a lie. We both of us forced the girl to go, and that devil Gresford knows it. The Maid doth love a nobler man than either of us—my Brother John. Let him look after her. He is a saint."

Gresford, hearing this statement and argument, said, "Your Majesty, I am the victor."

"Aye, aye," said the King. "but thou art not yet the survivor."

"Then let me be;" and forthwith, in His Majesty's presence, he ran a concealed dagger right through the heart of the helpless Kingston, who called out one word, "Devil," and expired.

Flinging his bloody weapon on the ground, he rushed towards Ida. "Thou art mine now; by the King's judgment we will be wed this very night." John placed himself between them and, with stern face and sterner voice, shouted, "Never."

"Your Majesty," said Gresford, "am I not now the survivor? Is not the Maid mine according to thy solemn judgment?"

"Yes," replied the King, "thou are the survivor, but not by true jousting, only by murder committed in my Royal Presence. Did not my Royal Trumpeter sound the blast 'Lay down your arms'? Why didst thou presume to disobey my Royal command? Go back to the Castle in disgrace and let me see thee on the morrow. I will think over what is to be done. What I have said, I have said. I will consider what shall be done with the Maid, and whether my royal judgment shall be carried out and the Maid be thine as thou claimest. Until then let her be conveyed to her chamber in the Castle." Poor Ida swooned.

The King was sorely troubled, and even strong men clad in mail turned away their faces to conceal a tear-drop of sympathy. The stoutest hearts and frames trembled in the presence of the dead Kingston and the distressed Maid. Would Gresford be allowed to leave the field alive? There were a hundred men prepared to crush and kill him then. A hundred voices echoed John's stern "Never." A hundred pairs of strong arms ready to lift, ever so gently, the Maid whose innocence had

been maligned, whose hand was to be given to someone whom her heart hated and despised. It was only the King's cold and regal presence which prevented those courtiers from at once tearing De Gresford to pieces and consigning him, along with the dead body of Kingston, to the cold swift waters of the Mersey.

Some there were who, with the King, thought more of the royal judgment than of the rules of chivalry, and who coldly argued that as the King had so decreed, the marriage must take place. Some there were too, of Gresford's friends, who thought the joust ought not to have been stayed and that the game "to death" should have been allowed to play its course. Ida, to them, was only a country wench, who would soon forget all the extraordinary incidents attaching to the ceremony of her marriage. She ought to be proud that she had won such a brave warrior as mate, and one who, at least, was madly in love with her, and moreover had the means and opportunity of enabling her to associate with the life of the Court.

Sir Peter was one who hated the affair. He at least had assisted in rescuing the Maid; he thought his efforts would lead to happiness, but instead here was greater trouble than ever. He therefore offered his assistance to Ida's mother and John, and most kindly kept his body guard with them, whilst the King and his retinue returned to the Castle.

Poor Ida! to return to life and consciousness was only to return to a lifelong death!

The full moon still shone over the deserted fields. The waters of the river lapped the shore. John, still brave and loving, was kneeling by her side, whilst her mother was anxiously applying wet bandages to that unconscious brain.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE KING'S CONSCIENCE.

"Thus conscience does make cowards of us all ;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought."

—"Hamlet."

EDWARD II. was weak and vacillating. His bugbear, the famous Earl of Lancaster, was dead, but his memory lingered. The Earl had united in himself the four Earldoms of Lincoln, Leicester, Derby and Lancaster. He was of royal blood, for, like the King, he was a grandson of Henry III. He was also eleventh Baron of Halton Castle, and the King's visit to Halton was tainted with revenge. The Earl had been almost the supreme power in the realm, and had stood at the head of the English baronage. But his character fell far beneath the greatness of his position. He raised a force against the King, entered into treasonable negotiations with the Scots, and ultimately, in 1322, only a year before King Edward's visit to Halton Castle, the Earl's forces were routed at Boroughbridge. The Earl took refuge in a chapel, saying, as he looked upon the crucifix, "Lord, I render myself to Thee and Thy mercy." He was, however, dragged out by the Royalists, who, despoiling him of his rich surcoat, clothed him in common livery and conveyed him down the river to York, where he was received with every kind of insult. Thence he was taken to Pontefract, and presented to the

King. The death of Gaveston was now to be avenged. The Earl of Lancaster was brought a prisoner into his own hall, and there the King condemned him as a notorious traitor, to be hanged, drawn and beheaded. Edward, however, remitted the more degrading parts of the sentence. The Earl was at once delivered into the hands of a band of Gascons, who put an old cap on his head, set him on a lean white pony without a bridle, and led him out to immediate execution. The presence of his confessor, a Dominican monk, who walked by his side, did not save the Earl from the insults of the Royalist rabble. They threw pellets of dirt at him, and derisively saluted him as "King Arthur." In this manner he was conducted to the summit of a hill without the town, where he was ordered to kneel, with his face towards his friends the Scots. "Have mercy on me, King of Heaven," cried Lancaster, "for my earthly King has forsaken me." There was no mercy from the King; it was not an attribute of the second Edward. The fall and death of Lancaster were, however, the presage to the decline of His Majesty's supreme power. No wonder, therefore, that the King was troubled on his return from the joust on the Mersey. There were other ghosts in the cupboards of Halton Castle than the look of the dead Kingston, and the distress of the Maid of Overton; royal proclamations might denounce the memory of Lancaster as that of a traitor, but nevertheless, noble martyrs are apt to leave monumental memorials. His Majesty sought the solitude of the royal bedchamber. To compare great things with small was not part of the royal office; to trouble about such a small incident as the death of an infamous monk or the marriage of a country maid would not, under ordinary circumstances, have caused more than

a passing thought in the royal mind. What cared he about either? But, in addition to these insignificant items were other small ghosts, which added to innumerable spectres of larger dimensions formed a combination of unpleasantries which destroyed that pleasurable state of mind which Kings ought to enjoy. 'Twere such a pity when other people—common people, without a drop of royal blood—thought for themselves, and arrived at conclusions not in harmony with royal decrees! 'Twere again a pity when royalty should be divorced from pleasure and associated with responsibility!

Ah! the King's freedom is confined to a very small garden—his conscience. His power to do what is right or wrong is subject to review by a large body of irresponsible critics—the whole nation—even then, mostly fools. If he is weak, an usurping authority asserts itself; if he is too strong, aspiring ambition calls it tyranny. If he tries to please both he falls between the two stools.

There were four or five ghosts peeping into the royal bedchamber that night; the larger one was the memory of the dead Lancaster—the knowledge that his living followers and adherents still revered him as a martyr. Then followed the slain Kingston—the claim of Gresford—the vow of Brother John. The sweetest ghost was the pretty face of Ida: that was an attractive ghost—he would never mind that ghost disturbing his sleep—the others were terribly repellent. The last ghost, which troubled him least, was the execution of his own personal, infallible judgment and the decree he had made to be consequent on the result of the water joust. What should he do? How should he decide? Which ghost will win?

Dismissing his groom of the bedchamber, he sat, or

rather tumbled into the royal chair, to think it all over. Must the marriage take place? He knew now, from the dead Kingston, that one of his own household—one whom he had trusted—De Gresford—had deliberately deceived him, had forcibly abducted the girl away—with lies had pretended that all had been carried out at the royal behest, and further had committed murder in the royal presence.

Ought such a villain to live? Ought such an one to marry so sweet a youthful innocence as Ida? Against all this there was his judgment—his promise—that the survivor should have the promised reward. Who was to suffer—the King or the Maid? If the marriage were now forbidden, the rules of chivalry—the King's decree, the highest in the land—would be the subject of public ridicule and scorn. The Maid had few friends; her relations were poor and without power. If she were forced to marry Gresford, no one worthy of consideration could complain. She would be part of his Court—he would often see her charming face, and if Gresford did not treat her properly, he could, on some pretext, order to be done to Gresford that which Gresford did to Kingston. Still this soliloquy was not satisfactory. He lay upon the royal bed, in the royal garb, to see if royal sleep would soothe the royal troubles. The moonlight pierced the obscured windows and formed pictures and strokes upon the walls which seemed to speak. The wind outside blew the ivy leaves upon the Castle walls to and fro against the window panes, conveying a seeming sigh or a gentle admonition. The military tread of the sentry below became a monotonous march which was hateful and distressing. He rolled from side to side trusting to a final roll of sleep. It never came. There was a dismal silence—a hush—which was driving him

frantic. What should he do? No one—not a friend he could trust to advise him. The dew of a disordered mind gathered on the royal forehead more thickly than the dew on the grass outside.

An ugly bat, swooping in its circular movements, and enjoying the evening breeze and the light of the moon, makes a false turn, crashes against the oiled paper panes of the window, dashes into the room and spreads its vampire claws at the foot of the royal bed.

Poor weak Edward! affrighted Royalty! Who would not shiver at the gaze of such a beast? Was it a presage of his own fallen state, that even his own bedchamber should become the haunt of that which is most associated with decay and death? Its wild staring eyes, its extended wings, guarded with sharp grasping claws, were uncanny in the extreme. The grim tightness of its clasp was suggestive of his own legal power to punish to the death.

Horror! it commences once more to circle and wheel around the room, until, attracted by the dim light of the candle, which seems to make the darkness more visible, it bangs through the feeble rays and out into the open again. Singed wings for its presumptuous trespass upon the abode of Royalty! Not the first follower who has been punished for such an offence. Still no sleep.

“In this the calmest and most stillest night,
With all appliances and means to boot,
Yet denied to a King.”

The thought occurred to him—was Ida asleep? Would it not be a relief for him to know that the one most affected by his judgment could sleep and thus prove that his decision had no baneful effect? If she could sleep he was sure he could, for he should then know that she was

reconciled to her fate. Why should he not go and ascertain for himself?

She had been ordered to her bedchamber in the Central Tower to await his final decision, which was to be given the following morning.

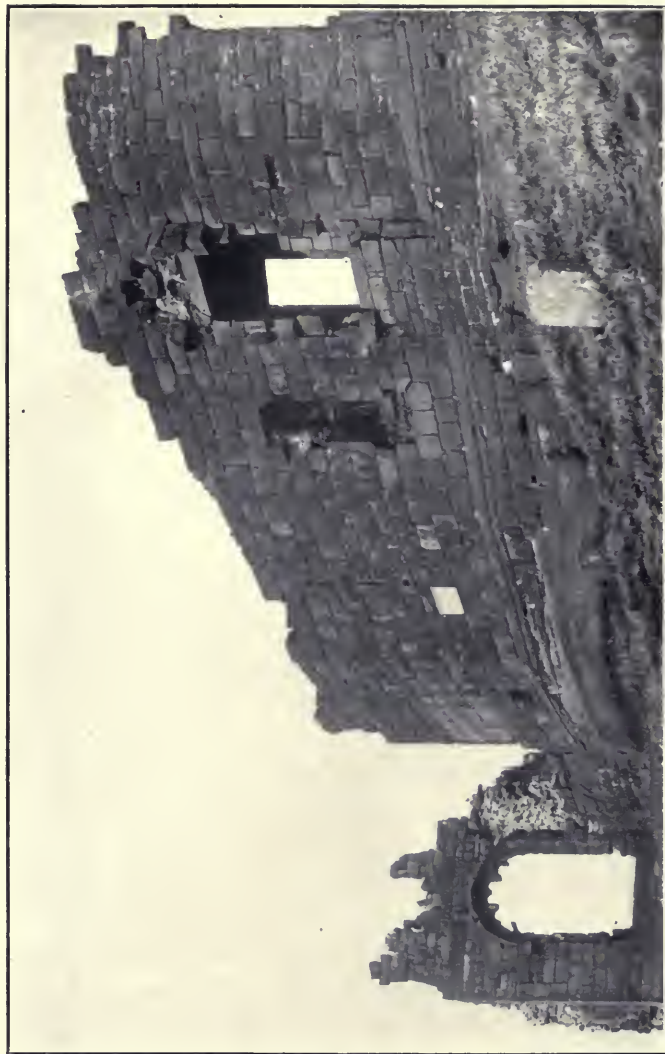
It was not so far away, and if he came across a sentry or two, or here or there a wakeful courtier, he could make the excuse that he was going round to see that everyone was doing their duty—a surprise visit. He rises, sits by the side of the bed for a moment or two. How those strong oaken doors studded with iron nails always creak, and creak louder when they ought not to creak at all! And then outside the door, there was that terribly long dreary stone-built passage and that flight of stone steps up to the Tower, all without a single light. The silence and the darkness were terrible to face. He pulls open the door by its large iron ring and latch. He looks stealthily down the corridor; he listens. Not the sound of a single step, except his own, and the repeating echo. He gropes his way, carefully, keeping his hand upon the stone wall until he comes to the turn for the Tower steps. This leads across a narrow wooden bridge out in the open, protected by thick wooden hand rails. The moon still shines and the adjoining trees cast a dark shadow over his path. He stays once more to think, before he opens the heavy Tower door. His footsteps are heard by the sentry who is placed below the bridge; he is challenged; reluctantly he answers “The King”—for he has forgotten the watchword—then rushes forward, bangs the door to again with a heavy clang, and again after mounting another flight of stone stairs is in the narrow passage which leads to Ida’s chamber. How he trembles!

He fears Ida may be awake; fears her mother may be with her, watching over her as only a mother does. The alarm of the sentry may cause the guard to assemble and he may be followed and discovered.

There is little time for action, so he opens Ida's door. The moonlight is streaming in, unobstructed by a single shadow, for the Central Tower was far above any other part of the Castle. Stealthily and quietly he approaches the bed. He looks down—he feels—gropes with his hands—his staring eyes—there was no Ida; the chamber was empty!

Steps can be heard; the guard is approaching. He can give no excuse, he cannot speak. His fear increases. Has Gresford carried her away? His brain whirls—he can stand it no longer. He is found lying prostrate and insensible on Ida's bed. The Captain of the guard examines him; his face is pale and white, all colour has gone. His eyes are closed, his mouth is firmly set, nor is he disturbed by the shakes which the Captain somewhat roughly administers with a view of restoration to sensibility and consciousness. "Send for the leech," whispers the Captain to Wigram, one of his subordinates, "also let us have here as quickly as possible Sir Peter de Dutton and the Lord Prior of Norton, or that Father John who was at the joust last night. Prithee, man, don't be asleep like the King. Fetch also the Maid of the Bedchamber, so that we may know how it be that the King hath had access to this chamber and what has become of the Maid of Overton."

"Aye, aye, Captain," replied Wigram; "the whole thing be mighty strange, however he got here, and what he came for at this time of night. There be another strange thing too, Captain, which thou hast not mentioned."



F. Ball, Photographer, Runcorn.

Part of Ruins, Walton Castle.

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"What be that, Wigram?" said the Captain.

"Why, by St. Mary, this bed thou canst see has never been slept in; not a single article has been disturbed except where the King lies. Dost think the Maid of Overton and the King, for some trick or other have changed beds?"

"Not a bit of it, Wigram; why should they? I perhaps cannot see so far as thy wily eyes, but give me a reason for such a strange suggestion."

"Aye, Captain, that is easily done. Didst notice the wild, determined look of Sir Barny last night? Didst observe he seemed as though he'd stick at nothing to attain his end of getting hold of the girl? May not the King have had the same idea, and to save the girl, have told her to go to his chamber, where she would be quite safe, and he has lain here to see if Sir Barny carried out one of his usual exploits?"

"Fie, man, the sentry challenged the King as he were crossing the wooden bridge. Hey, sentry, whom didst thou see when thou gav'st the challenge and call'st out the guard?"

"Aye, Captain, I saw someone much like His Majesty."

"Didst see anyone else?"

"Not that I may be sure of, but what puzzles my poor pate, Captain, is to find the King in this chamber. I be dreaming if after the King answered my challenge, he, or someone else, did not leave the Central Tower and went towards that part of the Castle where the royal apartments be. I thought it were the King returning, because I challenged him, and not wanting to be found, he had hastened back."

"Well, well, sentry, whatever thou hast dreamed, here

for certain be a live King ; but, Wigram, if thou delay, I won't swear he'll be alive to-morrow. Carry out my orders at once, and first wake up the Maid of the Bed-chamber, and let's see what she knows ; after that send for the other three according to my commands. By St. Thomas, this be an awkward mess."

Presently, Priscilla the maid came rubbing her eyes, half asleep and half dressed, full of wonder to find the chamber filled with the Captain and men of the guard.

"Priscilla," said the Captain, "thou art a sweet girl to come so quickly. Be not disturbed, but we are anxious to know how the King, who lieth on the bed sick, came to this room where the Maid ought to be sleeping. Where is she?"

"The King here on the Maid's bed ! By the Holy Virgin, if the Maid be not there, I know not what I am talking about. Her mother came after the joust and told me she was so overcome with the affair that she would be late in her retirement and that I need not stay up, and that she would see after the so-called Ida, so I went to my own chamber and was soon fast asleep until I heard that knock and thy summons to come here. Art sure the Maid be not here?"

"Well, search for thyself, but do not disturb His Majesty, who, so far as our poor eyesight goes, seems to be the only occupant of the bed. Wouldst like to get in thyself to make sure?"

Priscilla felt all over the bed except where His Majesty lay, searched the private cupboards, indeed looked everywhere, but all in vain.

"Well, well, my lady has flown. The prettiest flowers are always cut first, and she was a daisy—a real sweet one—too good for that villain Gresford. Where be he?"

"Aye, Priscilla, that be a mystery too. Hast thou seen him about the Central Tower since the joust was concluded?"

"Aye, Captain, that be a question, as though I should be on the look out for Barny de Gresford! It ought to be t'other way about, and if that young maid had not turned up, it would have been too, but men's eyes be soon captured with new flowers."

"Oh, aye, Priscilla, but women like fine fruit, otherwise thy mother Eve would still be living in Eden and thou wouldst never have been born nor me either."

"Fie, Captain! Mother Eve living now! What a fright she would have been at this age! Besides, the world could never have gone on without a fine man like thou."

"Or a sweet maid named Priscilla," gallantly chimed in the Captain. "But thou dost not answer my question about Gresford, and besides, here's the King: canst thou not charm him like other men?"

"Whom do I charm? I might take lessons in that art from thee. I would much rather charm thee than that sleeping piece of injustice and tyranny some folk call King."

"Priscilla!"

"Yes, Captain."

"What about Gresford?"

"Oh! prithee, don't bother me about such a man. He ought to be dungeoned; instead of that he seemed so pleased with his success at the joust, that he comes serenading under my window by moonlight, not to attract me, but that Maid. I declined to answer his call or even to look at him, but I did just peep and make sure that it was him. So if he concluded that I had gone to sleep,

there is no knowing what hath happened to him and that Maid he seemeth to adore. I am sure she don't like him, but he seemed mad upon her and beyond my small charms. Soon, however, thy messengers will surely return with some news. Aye, here they come."

Wigram, with two attendants, entered, and Priscilla and the Captain were then apparently, and for appearance sake, extremely busy for the first time in rubbing the King's hands, loosening his coat around the neck, and bathing his face and head with cold water.

"Captain," said Wigram, "the leech be on his way, but in the meantime he said you should give the King a prod with your sword to see how he likes the form of punishment he is so fond of administering to others. He said there was nothing like letting blood out, especially if it be royal blood. The Lord Prior will be here shortly. Father John, the Maid of Overton, her mother and Barny be all missing; and worst of all Sir Peter de Dutton, who should be on duty, is not at his post."

"Zounds, pother man, what bad news thou dost bring!" said the Captain; then, with a twinkle in his eye, "they must have escaped while Priscilla and I have been busy looking after the King. I know that they could not have got away whilst the guard I command has been on duty. It were absolutely impossible—impossible, I say. Priscilla, this hard work of bringing life again to the King doth deserve some great recompense. I can't keep it up any longer. Wilt thou fetch me a mug of new brewed ale? I feel quite overcome; this chamber be unbearably hot and stuffy. Perhaps if I came with thee to carry it 'twould be the better."

"Oh!" said Priscilla, "I scarcely know the way to the

brewhouse, and at this time of the night I don't care to go there in the dark—leastways by myself, especially with all these ghosts about.”

“Sweet maid of the chamber, what an idea! I know the cellar quite as well as thou, perhaps better, but these passages and walls and rooms and steps in this part of the Castle bother me so much thou must come with me to show me the way.”

“Aye, Captain, but who will look after the King?”

“As for His Majesty, here be Wigram and his two men; they surely be enough. Now, Wigram, and all of you, keep on rubbing his hands until I return; rub them hard, same as Priscilla and me.”

So he linked his arm in that of the lovely Priscilla and went off to find the ale which was to be so much sweeter when drawn under such charming conditions.

How long the Captain was away tasting the ale, as well Priscilla's lips, it is difficult to say; the time passed quickly in the cellar. The Captain then returned alone, considerably elated with the success which had attended the expedition. Still he was able to notice that the leech was now in attendance upon the King.

“I—I shay, Vickers, or—or what's thy name, I—I shay—how's that—that f—fool of a K—King going on? Sure—surelee, the most exal—exalted man—you—you, Master Vic—Vickers—has cured—cured him by this. If he bain't better, let him go to the—the cel—cellar—with—the love—lovely 'Scilla, and she—she will cure him—aye, in a minute.”

“Captain,” said the precise Vickers, the leech, “there be no such medicine prescribed by my learned order—never heard of it. 'Scilla—'scilla—whatever be it? No such

herb about here. Leeches—leeches, Captain, be the only proper remedy. See how fat they are getting when they feed on royal blood.”

“Well I nev—never, Vic—Vickers! Don’t really—don’t know ’Scilla, the best—aye, the sweet—sweetest med—medicine in Halton, aye, aye, in the world!” In truth this medicine must have been strong—very strong—for the Captain would have kissed the stone floor, had not two of the guard—one on each side—held him up. Vickers, twitting him, said “Captain, ’Scilla may be good.” “Good, good man! There—there be nothing bet—better,” interjected the Captain, “and that very—very talk remembers me that the Maid—the Maid—there is so much—so much bother about is called Godman. She—she be nearly—only nearly—nearly—remember, only nearly as sweet—sweet as ’Scilla.”

“Well, well, Captain, let ’Scilla and the Maid of Overton alone. See the King: my leeches have made him open his eyes; could anything be stronger than that—all in a few minutes!”

The Captain braced himself up, attempted, with a few hiccoughs, to salute and speak to his Majesty, but Vickers silenced him.

Presently the King asked where he was, and when told he was in the Central Tower, in the chamber assigned to the Maid of Overton, requested to know how he got there and where she was. Information was given him of her flight and of the others, upon which he begged to be taken to his own chamber.

“Hèy, your Majesty,” said the Captain, standing as straight as the home brewed ale would permit, “if thou doesna feel well, try—try—I say, try a bit of ’Scilla.”

“No, no, Captain, try leeches, leeches, Sir, leeches, and none of your 'Scilla.” The Captain went off singing as best he could :—

“'Scilla: give me 'Scilla in the cellar,
Just when I know I'm a poor sick fellow,
And some rollicking stuff like nut brown ale,
Which helps me to fight and never to fail.

“'Scilla, 'Scilla, let us fill up the mug,
And just let the Captain give you a hug,
A kiss on your lips just when his mouth slips
Is sweeter by far than a hundred good nips.

“So here's to the King and the Queen, 'Scilla,
And the sweet girl I pulled off her pillow ;
Who takes a good cue and knows how to brew,
'Tis 'Scilla for me but sillie for you.”



CHAPTER XIV.

THE COURT JESTER.

“Not such a fool as he looks.”

CAPTAIN DELAMERE, the captain of His Majesty's body-guard, in his rollicking manner, proceeded across the courtyard with a view of keeping personal control over himself in the guardhouse, knowing very well that his Lieutenant might be trusted to look after the King, and give the best excuses for his own enforced absence. He quietly, but good naturedly, held a court-martial over his own procedure, and being both prisoner and judge, decided that his own nervous condition was due to an excess of exertion in rubbing the King's hands, and he vowed that he would never do so again. He admonished himself most severely as being too strict in the performance of duties—in fact over zealous—it was not part of his work to rub Kings' hands—insisted upon a promise of reform, and wisely administered the severe punishment of twelve consecutive hours of confinement and sleep.

Before this righteous judgment could be fully executed to his own satisfaction, and whilst his unrestrained body could be lawfully taken possession of, and his state of mental elevation permitted an assumption of ownership of the entire Castle and Courtyard, an incident occurred which seemed to him in the nature of a motive for the

arrest or stay of execution and a suspension of final judgment.

Roaming all over the yard, and with difficulty restraining an occasional fall on the slippery pavements (slippery pavements really are awkward—after a visit to the cellar), he ultimately discovered that he was not in sole possession. This was an aggravation which, in his high position of Captain in charge, could not be overlooked or permitted to continue.

He stood stock still; placing, however, his legs, or rather the most stable portion of his understandings, somewhat wide apart, so as to prevent that physical downfall which disturbing elements in the upper circles are apt to bring about. His attention, so far as his serious condition would permit, was arrested by a person almost as distinguished as himself. The stranger for some reason, possibly as great, appeared to cling to the walls of the west battlements. Yet his dress denoted that he was no part of that loyal force which so distinguished an officer as Delamere at that time commanded.

The stranger was gesticulating with hands wide apart as though addressing a crowd of people below the walls. His language was somewhat incoherent and to the Captain it seemed a kind of double Dutch. This, however, might have been attributable to the fact that both gentlemen had somewhat early paid a visit to the Castle cellars, no doubt in discharge of the onerous duties attached to their respective callings.

Seeing his competitor was engaged in the learned occupation of lecturing an imaginary crowd, and also judging that his speech was not of the most refined order, the Captain coughed, but no attention was paid. The

lecturer proceeded with his lecture and gesticulated all the harder. The Captain went a step or two nearer and gave two loud coughs, but without avail. He then braced himself up, and was much surprised to find that at least for a minute he was able to call out with real and loud military zeal and bearing, the single word—"Attention!"

Whereupon the stranger, with some knowledge of tactics, proceeded to stand erect and the manual gymnastics ceased. However, he still stood with his back to the officer. Delamere, thinking, quite correctly, that his attitude was not quite courteous, proceeded to consider what the next order should be.

After an interval of five minutes, during which his mental aberration prevented the exercise of military achievements of a high order, he braced himself up once more, just about an inch higher than on the occasion of the first order, and called out loudly and sternly: "Right about—right back face."

The stranger, whose external developments, in the shape of auricles, were somewhat conspicuous, and consequently induced a fine sense of correct manners, turned sideways, so as to present to the Captain a profile with a very prominent and pointed nasal organ, an eye with a blurred blue appearance, a chin which might belong to a grandfather, and a mouth which was large enough to swallow a mug. Clean shaven as he should have been—but was not, the stubble, which was growing somewhat freely, denoted a darkness which corresponded with his jet black hair, somewhat presenting a juvenile appearance which accompanied his genial and jovial disposition. His dress, even at so early an hour, proved his occupation, for he was no other than the Court Jester.

The Captain's powers of observation were not bright and acute that morning, or he had wasted them all upon the pretty Priscilla; so after due consideration and the exercise of self control, he ventured to walk the few paces which severed him from the Jester, just touched him with his first finger under the chin, and whispered somewhat loudly, "I say, old fellow, didn't I say—didn't I say 'right about face'?"

The Jester, as though he might have received an electric touch, proceeded to show the other side of his profile, but with enough smile on to display a jocularity which prevented austerity on the part of the provoked Delamere, who again touched the Jester with the tip of his finger and whispered:—"Well, do it half turn." They were now face to face, or perhaps more correctly—according to the language of the cellar—barrel to barrel.

"I say, Jester."

"Well, pon my soul! you, an officer of the guard, a man of eddication or supposed, or ought, or should be, you don't know how to address a brother officer, a superior colleague. I am, or was, and always have been, His Majesty's Fool."

"Well, Brother Fool, or what's your name, you was wasting your fragrance on the desert air, so 'scuse me, I thought I'd stop it."

"What fragrance and which desert?"

"Aye, I just forgot thou wert the Fool. When I saw thee spouting o'er the battlement walls to the sym—sympathetic, but imaginary crowd below, I thought it my duty to prevent such a waste of wisdom. If I could have done, as I could have done if I would, I was minded to fetch a bucket to catch thy rations—'scuse me—oration, or that part of it which was inspired with new brewed ale. It

ain't often that oracular wisdom is accompanied by Truth, but somehow thy speech seemed weighty and lacked jest, thy usual attribute. Possibly my ears deceived me. I judged thee to be for once in one of thy sober moods."

"Just as sober as thou, Captain, which 'aint giving myself an extremely high character, but as we be brothers in arms, I am satisfied with an equality, which perhaps thou wilt generously concede is not a high claim on my part."

"Ah! Jester, thou makest a mighty high claim—dost hear?—a very high and mighty claim. If thou wert 'Scilla, it couldn't be higher, yet it would moreover be more acceptable. Dost know who 'Scilla is?"

"Well, well, Captain, who doesn't know 'Scilla, with cheeks as red as roses and lips as sweet—as sweet—as herself?"

"What now, Jester, dost thou mean? Why—why—when I just touched—mind you—only just touched those lips—like—like honey, as you wanted to say but didn't—quite—quite brief—she told me straight out, I—I—Captain Delamere—was the only bee that ever tasted such honey. And, mind you—that's only some ten or twelve minutes ago."

"Aye, aye, Captain, what a joke! You call it honey ten minutes ago, when she seemed half asleep going to the chamber of the Maid of Overton. Be she then dreaming or not, I gathered all the honey an hour ago. I know there wasn't a speck left for thee or anyone else." "Pother man," she said, "go and look over the west battlements and see that the real golden honey of the Castle is not taken." Now, bother me, I can't understand that. What does she mean by the real golden honey, and why must I go to the west battlements?"

“ Oh, aye, wiseacre ; why, because 'Scilla knew you had a muddled brain and that I, the Captain—do you hear?—the Captain of the Guard was just coming.”

“ Aye, aye, Captain, but my muddled brain could just count four—I did, as you don't, or can't or won't—I put two and two together—that makes four, don't it, Captain Delamere? so I just thought No. 1 of golden battlements and No. 2 of west honey—don't that make four?”

“ No, Jester, it don't—it makes a lot more, it makes me think—which is quite contrary to Army Regulations—at least for a Captain. But you bother me—you, as our General says—when he ain't bothered and muddled—transposes your fine words. I know 'Scilla—sweet girl—never said golden battlements and west honey. No such nonsense—she's worth two of that—aye, there's your sum of four again—she meant or she said (and she meant all she said): 'There be golden honey on the west battlements.' And you—fool and jester as you are, or say you are, and you ain't very wrong there—came to these west battlements to find the golden honey. Where be it? Tention! again I say.”

“ Ah! Captain, I say 'Tention! I know you bain't a bad lot and you's fond of pretty faces, sweet lips, gathering honey and plucking other people's flowers, but you's decent, you's good form—and if you do kiss 'Scilla—after me—it only shows very—very plainly—we's both good looking—at least I am—and that our feelings are much both alike. But you know we bain't twins—at least I never knew as you were my twin.”

“ Bother your twins,” said the Captain, collecting himself together; “ what honey did you find on the west

battlements? 'Scilla don't know parables, but I see she can talk them."

"Aye, aye, Captain, what did I see?"

"Yes, what did you see? Who were you talking to when I came up here?"

"Talking to! Was I—was I really?"

"Well, if you were talking, you were really talking, I suppose."

"I suppose so too."

"Well?" inquired the Captain, expecting a reply.

"Well, I either saw or dreamed I saw—I can't say which—right out in the distance—towards Chester way—two men on horseback, each with a woman in the pillion behind—one woman seemed dressed in white. They were travelling fast, and behind—a long way behind—there seemed a squire of some sort on another horse, galloping as hard as the horse could go, as though he would overtake, if he could, the party in front."

"Zounds, man!" said the Captain, "why didst not tell me this before? That was 'Scilla's honey—the Maid of Overton—and that wasp behind was that vile scamp Barnaby de Gresford. All to be seen from the west battlement where we now stand. 'Scilla's got in her head more brains than you have in your little finger, and the King would tell you the same. 'Scilla ain't been asleep when she told you to come to these walls to search for honey, and you ain't such a fool as you really are, and look to be, pretending to talk to an imitation crowd. That new brewed ale ain't taken too deep root; you know'd all you was doing and saying. Out with it."

"No, Captain, I've nothing more to say; but I'll just add, if you love 'Scilla and wants to please her and me—

particularly me—you'll just get into the saddle with your men and gallop as hard as the devil, and, by hook or by crook, prevent that other devil from doing any harm to the Maid of Overton, as I heard him say he would, if he once got the chance."

The reply of the Captain came with the noise of thunder and the speed of lightning :

"Saddle up, men ! Save the Maid of Overton !"

In five seconds ten saddles were filled, twenty spurs were at work, and the force of a battalion was winging through the air at a dare-devil speed.

Will they be in time ?



CHAPTER XV.

ST. MARY'S CONVENT, CHESTER.

"Some angels guide my pencil, while I draw
What nothing less than angels can exceed—
Good maids on earth devoted to the skies."

—"Night Thoughts."

THE Castle still stands; the Convent is gone. The military fortress, with its handsome Norman Tower, styled "the Julian Tower," still looks over the Welsh vales and hills, but not as of yore, with an unfriendly eye ready to resist the impetuous but fruitless attacks of Celtic dash and blood. The Convent, not a stone of which stands upon its original site, was destroyed in the name of ruthless religion, and dissolved at the instance of Henry VIII., and its inmates dispersed. Yet the warriors of both Castle and Convent remain; their works do follow after them.

Let us examine the foundation of the one which has gone—never to be replaced. Immediately to the north-west of the Castle of Chester, there was erected, some seven hundred years ago, a Benedictine Convent dedicated to St. Mary. That it was of ancient origin is proved by the following record which appears in the Domesday Book of our first King William:—

"In monasterio sanctæ Mariæ, quod est juxta ecclesiam sancti Johannis, jacent duæ bovætæ terræ quæ wastæ erant, et modo sunt wastæ."

Translated into plain English, it means, that "the

monastery of St. Mary is near the Church of St. John, and holds two bovates of land which were and are waste." It will be noticed that the term "Monastery" is used, which with our modern English ideas, seems to imply a religious house for men, but Abbot Gasquet in his work on "English Monastic Life," asserts that the title "convent," as well as that of "monastery" and "abbey," was formerly applicable to any house of either monks or nuns, and the exclusive use of the word "convent" for a religious house of women is quite of modern origin. Ormerod seems to have fallen into this error, for with respect to St. Mary's Convent and the Latin description above quoted, he makes this remark:—"This monastery has been generally supposed to have merged in a nunnery," whereas, as before stated, the term monastery formerly implied a religious house either for men or women. Possibly Dr. Jessop in his paper entitled "Daily Life in a Mediæval Monastery" has explained the proposition more clearly than other writers. He says: "A monastery in the thirteenth century meant what we now understand it to mean—namely, the abode of a society of men or women who lived together in common—who were supposed to partake of common meals; to sleep together in one common dormitory; to attend certain services together in their common church, to transact certain businesses or pursue certain employments in the sight and hearing of each other in the common cloister; and when the end came, to be laid side by side in the common graveyard, where, in theory, none but members of the order could find a resting-place for their bones. When I say 'Societies of men and women' I am again reminded that the other term 'convent' has somewhat got to be used commonly in a mistaken sense. People use the word as if

it signified a religious house tenanted exclusively by women. The truth is that a convent is nothing more than a Latin name for an association of *persons* who have *come together* with a view to live for a common object, and to submit to certain rules in the ordering of their daily lives. The monastery was the common dwelling-place, the convent was the society of persons inhabiting it, and the ordinary formula used when a body of monks or nuns execute any corporate act—such as buying or selling land—by any legal instrument is ‘The Prior and Convent of the Monastery of the Holy Trinity at Norwich,’ ‘the Abbot and Convent of the Monastery of St. Peter’s, Westminster,’ ‘the Abbess and Convent of the Monastery of St. Mary’s and St. Bernard at Lacock,’ and so on.”

Canon Morris, in his history of Chester during the Plantagenet and Tudor periods, is inclined to consider that there was a monastery near St. John’s Church, which was merged in the nunnery near the Castle, for the erection of which Randle Gernons (fourth in descent from Hugh, the first Norman Earl of Chester) gave land. Randle was Earl of Chester between the years 1128 and 1153. If, therefore, St. Mary’s nunnery was erected during his Earldom, near the Castle, and consequently some distance from St. John’s Church, it may be inferred that the Monastery of St. Mary’s referred to in the Domesday, could not possibly be the nunnery near the Castle, because it was not then erected. For this reason, no doubt, Canon Morris adds that it is probable that the lands mentioned in Domesday were appropriated to St. Mary’s Chantry in the Church of St. John.

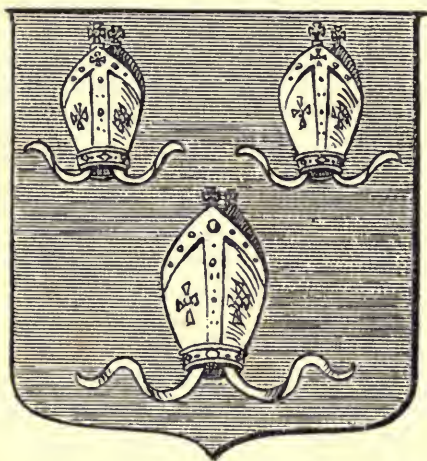
Mr. Ferguson Irvine, in his article in the Chester “Archæological Journal” in 1907 on “The Nunnery of St.

Mary," admits that the reference in Domesday to a monastery near St. John's Church, is an archæological puzzle, as none is known to have been placed there. In this connection it is interesting to mention that, while all nunneries founded during Anglo-Saxon times were abbacies, those founded after the Conquest were generally priories. Sixty-four Benedictine nunneries date their foundation from after the Conquest, only three of which were abbacies.

We brush on one side these historic details ; we will not quibble as to its exact original situation, or whether the compiler of Domesday was right or wrong in stating that it was originally near St. John's, or whether the Domesday Book reference is to a priory or another monastery. We may content ourselves by imagining the Prioress of that Norman period, lolling upon a Norman chair or settle, with a Norman goose-quill in her hand, filled with Norman ink, pensively, solemnly and ceremoniously filling up Form IV. of the Finance Act of that period, and possibly she, with a merry twinkle, may have mentally decided to give the then Chancellor (if such exalted office were then in existence and filled by an anti-land statesman) something to think about and some difficulty in discovering the whereabouts of the habitation. That this is not pure imagination (as some evil-minded persons may be inclined to suppose) let us remember that the information conveyed to the authorities was that "the two bovates" (a bovaté was about fifteen statute acres) "of land were, and are, waste." "No land taxes from me," says the Prioress, for even Normans were not so uncivilised as to demand State duties in respect of undeveloped land. Form IV. was, we may be sure, filled up after great consideration, and with the best

legal advice, but possibly not under the dire threat of the enormous penalty of fifty pounds which unscrupulous intellects of modern times do not hesitate to use towards all His Majesty's liege subjects in these later days.

Apart from Domesday, we do know that St. Mary's Nunnery was undoubtedly erected within the walls of the ancient City of Chester, and that it was on the north-west side of the old Castle, because old prints of its ruins show the exact spot, and close by—to-day—is Nun's Lane, the Nun's Gardens, and other names, all tending to show that



ARMS OF CHESTER PRIORY.

[Taken from Tanner's "Notitia Monastica."]

we are not very far wrong if we go and stand in the garden attached to the residence of the Venerable Archdeacon Barber, whose love of archæology makes him a safe adviser on all points of local history. Why, however, trouble as to the exact site? and in answer we say, What would

Gethsemane be without the History and Passion of our Lord? Would Bethlehem be known, or Calvary visited, were it not for the record of the life and death of the Saviour of man? Even so, in a small way, St. Mary's Nunnery, with the quiet uneventful life of the inmates, is to be associated with "Ida."

Before she arrives, or rather attempts to arrive there, let us just peep inside. Let us draw on one side the thick dusty veil of six hundred years, and learn what the valuable manuscript discovered at Vale Royal informs us. Precious book—so full of detail—overflowing with the romance of a life hidden from the world, yet breathing even to-day a history full of sweetness, tenderness and unostentatious hospitality, which might well be copied by the pioneers of present day social, yet very muscular and wide-mouthed, Christianity! Ah! those nuns with their Prioress knew the business of their little world as well as its solitude and sanctity. They looked after everyone under their care. They secured to their tenants exemption from service on juries. They had not to pay the city tolls. The officers of the great Norman Earls had no jurisdiction over them, or those employed by them, nor had they even a right of entry. If fines were imposed upon any of their tenants in the Earl's Court, the nuns were entitled to such fines, and if any sheriff interfered with their liberties, he was liable to a fine of £10 to be paid in silver. On the other hand, the nuns were not to bring upon their estates, tenants of any other description than they then had, and were not to exercise any trade which would be injurious to the merchandise of the city. No Free Trade there! One wonders whether it was by sweet persuasion or austere demand these extraordinary privileges were obtained in the

first instance, and from time to time ratified and confirmed by successive Sovereigns and Norman Earls. It can easily be guessed that the coyness and smile of a sweet willed nun had its advantages then as now. Grants of land, and other rights, swelled their income and increased their power for good. For over three hundred years (from 1162 to 1475) they were patrons of the living of the Church at Over, dedicated to St. Chad, and their nominees were known as Rectors of Over. The Nunnery was founded about 1150, and the patronage of the church and Rectory of Over was vested in the convent about 1162. The church then stood almost in the centre of the village of Over, about a mile from where it is now located, but, because it probably was not then in existence, it is not mentioned in Domesday, the compilation of which was completed in 1086. The Prioress and nuns took a special and affectionate interest in this church at Over, and often some friend of the Nunnery was presented to the living, and her Ladyship the Prioress would occasionally visit the church to see as to its condition, and to renew a valued friendship with its Rector. The nuns even sold the tithes of Over and other parishes to the Monastery of Vale Royal, but somehow or other they got them back again, for at the dissolution of the monastery, the Abbot admits that the tithes of Over were held by him under a lease from the Prioress of St. Mary's. Further there is a farm in Wharton not very distant from Over Church, which is to-day called "The Nun House Farm," and which belonged to St. Mary's.

The building held by the Convent consisted of a church, a cloister, and a chapel and library, also a residence for the Prioress and dormitories and refectory for the nuns.

Young maidens from the best families in and around the city were also received for the purpose of instruction, which combined a secular and a religious course. A convent education then remained the sole means of acquiring knowledge of which a girl could avail herself outside the home circle. Education in a nunnery secured the privilege of being addressed as "Madame," the title of a woman of the upper class. The Universities absolutely ignored the existence of women as being desirous or capable of acquiring knowledge. Latin was undoubtedly taught in the Convent, if only so far as to enable a nun to repeat her prayers, to follow Mass, and to transcribe a book of devotion. On Latin falling into disuse, French was substituted. French, down to the middle of the fourteenth century, was the language of the upper classes as well as the legal language. English was first heard at the opening of the Session of Parliament at Westminster in 1363 (thirty years after the period we are considering), and in 1404 French was unintelligible to the English Ambassadors in Flanders. The Prioress was nominated by the nuns, and the name selected was submitted for the approval of the Benedictine Abbot of St. Werburgh. The nuns had to take an oath "by the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, at the peril of their soul, according to God and their conscience to name and choose her, as Prioress, who was most needful to the Priory." The Abbot would occasionally look in at the Convent to give assistance and guidance, but this was seldom needed except for special religious observances. The guidance upon which the nuns placed most reliance was from above, and daily prayers, sometimes hourly, were offered to the Saviour of men and women, and to His Maiden Mother (the only one the

world has ever known), Holy Mary, to whom their earthly temple was solemnly dedicated.

Dame Marie of Chester was Prioress at the time when King Edward the Second made his visit to Halton, in October, 1323. She was a lady of exceptional ability and wide experience. The sweetness of her face, appearance and conversation, the courtesy she extended to all, the tact and discernment she displayed in the administration of the internal and external affairs of the convent, won for her the esteem and respect of everyone. Her original surname, before she took the veil, and was married for ever to Christ, was Wilbraham, and as such she was well connected and known to all the great families of Cheshire. Her father, Randolph Wilbraham, died when she was young, so her mother, Alice, decided that after completing her education in this country, she should travel in France, so that she should not lack any accomplishment, and should be well fitted to discharge any duties which might fall to her lot. Whilst abroad she became attached to a convent of Benedictine nuns, and subsequently was removed to the nunnery at Chester, the only one in her native county. Here she worked for the glory of God and the weal and welfare of the souls and bodies of those around her. To the sisters in the convent, both in health and sickness, she administered the necessaries of life with piety, prudence, care and honesty. The example of her holy conversation and chastity, in conjunction with her pious exhortations and charity, caused each one to know how, in the words of the Apostle, "to possess her vessel in sanctification and honour." She built a new and improved infirmary for the sick, and beneath it she constructed a watercourse, through which a stream flowed across the

Roodeye to the Dee, with sufficient force to carry off all refuse that might corrupt the air. To this she connected a drain from the cloister so that the nuns should be able, without discomfort from damp, to enjoy the pure fresh air. She planted shrubs and trees on the south-east side, so as to hide from view the bare stones of the Castle walls, and to prevent the nunnery garden from being overlooked by the Constable and his garrison. A pulpit was erected in the refectory in imitation of the one at St. Werburgh's, so that the sisters might, during the time of meals, hear of the wise sayings of others, and listen to the precepts of the Son of Mary. Her desire was, with due care and despatch, to uproot, destroy and dissipate all that was harmful and noxious, not only to the bodies but also to the souls of those entrusted to her care. She was none the less zealous in works of charity, gladly and freely exercising hospitality, so that she and the sisters might find favour with One, whom Lot and Abraham and others have also pleased by the grace of hospitality. She willingly and graciously, as did all the sisters, carried out the rule of St. Benedict, which taught them that "Before all things and above all things special care must be taken of the sick, so that they be served in very deed, as Christ Himself, for He saith, 'I was sick and ye visited Me,' and 'What ye did to one of these, My least brethren, ye did to Me.'" The only ornament she wore was a brooch, on which were inscribed the words, "*Amor vincit omnia*" ("Love conquers all things"). Moreover, because she greatly loved to honour the House of God and the place where His glory dwells, she adorned the Church with crosses, reliquaries, precious stones, vestments and books. Nor were the accounts of the lands attached to the Convent neglected; all receipts

and expenditure were carefully and correctly noted. For example, the first item was invariably the cost of the parchment on which the accounts were written. The rent of the Nun House Farm in Wharton, Winsford, is entered as :—

			£	s.	d.
Rent of tenement in Danam*	...	...	2	13	4
A salt house in Middlewick	...	...	1	6	8
The Rectory of Over	...	...	8	13	4
A House in Nantwich, called Wych House			1	13	4

On the debit side would appear :—

				s.	d.
Sholder le molton	...	...	..	0	1½
Two lambs	...	...	...	0	8
Two greycs (young pigs)	...	...	...	0	6
70 hard dried fish	...	...	...	11	6
Salmon from the Dee...	...	...	...	0	3

Appertaining to this it must be remembered that not only the nuns, sixteen in number, but the novices and retainers of the convent had to be fed, and that a large proportion of the daily scholars stayed for a midday meal. The Convent was a little world of industry in itself, where spinning, weaving, woofing, warping and dyeing, as also art needlework, embroidery, writing and illuminating of books, were not only taught, but exercised by these sisters both economically and profitably. Each member of the convent was bound to serve in the convent kitchen as cook for the term of a week. Large hangings were made for the decoration of the church walls, and shorter ones for the altars, thirteen in number. The proficiency acquired by the girl scholars in the nunnery school was not lost if they returned to the world. We know that badges and standards were worked by ladies at Baronial Courts during the age

*" Danam " means " Davenham," in which parish Wharton is situate.

of romance, and their work was no doubt influenced by what had been evolved in church decoration.

Dame Marie superintended all the work of the convent—all for love—not an earthly love—the love and honour of God, Christ His Son and the Blessed Virgin Mother. On the evening of the day before the memorable day we are about to record, she had her sixteen sisters all seated in the refectory of the nunnery for the evening reading called the Collation, at which all were bound to be present. Dame Marie seemed more than usually pensive and subdued. She had decided to take personal charge of the procedure. After it was over and after a stroll in the cloister, the conventual bell would toll for Compline, the last of the religious rites of the day. As she entered the chapel, clad in her black gown, the sisters all rose. Every head was bowed lowly, in token of personal and official respect, nor was a single face raised or a seat taken until she herself had graciously acknowledged such respect and had seated herself on the south side of the high altar. Then there was a silence which could almost be heard; the rushen candles glimmered a dull dead light, just revealing the sweet pale faces of those who were privileged to listen. Dame Marie slowly rose and stood in front of the altar, whilst the one who acted as sacristan advanced towards her, bowing deeply three times, and then formally yet unnecessarily requested silence. Dame Marie, that evening, desired to impress the sisters with the value of true worship, and that their affections should be fixed upon God, Who through all trials, whether physical or otherwise, would effectually sustain and protect them, and finally give them a seat by His side. So she began to tell them the story of the infant child, Hugh of Lincoln, who had

been murdered by the Jews of that city in the year 1255.

"Some sixty or seventy years ago," began the Prioress, "there lived in the city of Lincoln a Christian widow with only one darling little child—a boy—named Hugh. He was the brightness of his mother's life; he served to remind her of the loved one who had gone before, and each moment he grew, the likeness seemed to increase. He was sent to the convent school to receive his first lessons, and there he learned of Christ's life and death, and of the blessed Virgin. He was taught at the early age of seven to kneel down and say his own Ave Maria. He was a good child; he forgot nothing, and his mother encouraged him in all his learning. At school, he heard the older children sing the antiphon, 'Alma redemptoris mater.' He listened to their words, enraptured with their music. He learned the first verse by heart, and although in the Latin tongue, by the following Christmas, he knew it all. A school companion explained the meaning of the verses. He sang it well and boldly. He loved it so much that he used to sing it twice each day, every note and word, both going to and returning from school. A beautiful child, a lovely voice and the sweetest music. No wonder Hugh's singing attracted attention and was the subject of many remarks.

"Now in this same city of Lincoln there was a Jewish quarter, and when the Jews heard the little fellow sing of Christ and His Mother, in the streets where they lived, they began to be annoyed, urging that such songs were unlawful. They insulted him, but his love for Christ made him bear all this without complaint, and he only sang all the louder and sweeter. They were afraid themselves to kill the boy, so they hired some ruffian to do it, and, one

day, when few people were about, the little darling's throat was cut to stop his singing, and his body was thrown away. Anxiously his mother waited for his return home, but, alas ! he did not come. She was beside herself. When daylight appeared, she awoke the neighbours, but no one could give her any information as to her boy. She went everywhere to try to find him ; at last she went to the Jewish quarter and asked about him, but they, one and all, said they had not seen him, and did not know where he was. Suddenly she heard the song and the voice she knew and loved so well, 'Alma redemptoris,' sung so loudly that all the place began to ring. She found him sitting upright, with his throat cut, singing away, but with no smile of recognition. The Christians carried him to the Abbey. His mother swooned by the dead body of the little innocent, whilst it lay in front of the high altar. The Abbot was about to arrange for the burial, and sprinkled the holy water on his dear face, when suddenly broke forth once more, 'O Alma redemptoris mater.' The Abbot was a holy man, and asked the boy how it was he could sing so beautifully although his throat was cut. Then, in simple childish language, he explained that his throat was cut to the neck bone and that he should have been dead a long time before, but that Jesu Christ willed that His glory should last, and be ever remembered, and for the worship of His Mother dear, he still might sing 'O Alma,' loud and clear. The Blessed Virgin had told him to sing it when dying, and he thought she had placed a grain under his tongue, and he should continue to do so until the grain was taken away, and if it were so taken, Christ's Mother had promised she would not forsake him. The Abbot took the grain from under the tongue and he ceased to sing on

earth, but, borne by angel wings, was taken straight to Heaven to join in the glorious song of the Lamb of God. His little body was placed under a monument of marble and the wicked Jews were all punished. Sisters, we too, like Hugh of Lincoln, will all sing 'O Alma redemptoris mater,' here in our beloved convent, so that we may sing it with the crowd of witnesses in Heaven above."

Tears streamed down each sister's eye; even the Prioress wept. The bell for compline tolled. The day was ended. Soon came sleep and rest, but the story of Hugh of Lincoln never sleeps. Dame Marie had preached a sermon never to be forgotten. Chaucer afterwards immortalised it in his "Canterbury Tales" and Wordsworth, in later years adapted it to our more modern verse.



CHAPTER XVI.

THE VISITORS TO THE NUNNERY.

“The mild splendours of the rising sun, the ruddy glowing tints of evening, the moon's calm radiance in a serene night—all these swell our bosoms with pleasure; but sweeter, still sweeter, is the recollection of a benevolent deed.”

—*Gessner.*

EACH sister had a separate bed in the dormitory curtained off from the others, but the bed ticks were filled with straw, not the soft feathers of to-day. Above each bed hung the crucifix. The long hours of toil and prayer induced a sound sleep which would not be disturbed by nocturnal gossip, for silence was enjoined upon all. All too soon, in the winter, was this peaceful repose disturbed, for shortly before two o'clock in the morning, the appointed sister would walk along the silent corridor with a wooden rattle, arousing the others from their peaceful slumbers. The caller says “*Benedicamus Domino*” (“Let us bless the Lord”). The sister within, when fully awake, answers, “*Deo gratias*” (“Thanks be to God”), and immediately she would rise, proceed to cross her forehead, and then wash and dress so as to attend *Matutinæ Laudes*. Between winter and Easter they were not required to rise till daybreak. Mattins and Lauds were followed by a return to bed and rest, when the nuns rose again and assembled in the choir of the church to celebrate the office of Prime, which occurred about daybreak. This was

followed by business in the Chapter House, also by a meal and work.

Two of the sisters that morning (being the one after hearing the Prioress's tale) were working in the nunnery garden. It was late in the autumn of the year 1323, and the winter apples and pears required to be gathered. The early morning dew had not yet disappeared. Sister Hilda carried a basket to gather in the ripened fruit, whilst Sister Johanna, wearing coarse sandals, was prepared to mount the loaded trees and relieve them of the heavy burden which caused the boughs to hang down. Each linked the other's arm, and the smile of womanly love and acquaintance showed that there was a more than friendly feeling between the two. St. Benedict may have laid down rules, and sisters may have sworn to consecration vows, but human nature is stronger than either. The basket was thrown down by Hilda on the damp grass with just a bit of a puckering smile and mischievous kick. "Joan," she said, "do you know I had such a dream last night! I don't often dream, but last night I saw, as plain as I see you there, a lovely girl, dressed all in white, lying fainting on one of the infirmary beds. Oh, she was so sweet, and she never moved: not once—and then she slowly faded away. I would give worlds to see that face again."

"Ah!" said Joan, "my dear Hilda, an' you believe dreams come true. I can see you do; just like that Hilda I know so well, and whose real sweetness a dream face is not a patch upon. Ave Maria! count your beads, dear, and do pick up that basket, and let's get those apples, which look almost as sweet as you. I love apples."

"Joan, your words are like butter, they really are; they melt in my mouth, and you make my heart go pit-a-pat.

Some dreams impress one more than others, and this one—oh! that face—it just looks at me now, for although there was a trace of distress, I knew I could buy back a sweet smile if I could only just put two drops of Benedictine between those pale lips. But she wouldn't wait, and how she went, and where, puzzles my poor head, for when I awoke, I had a smile on my own face, and I actually felt on my own bed, thinking she was there, but the lighted cresset showed me she was not."

"Hilda, by St. Mary, I do believe you are really in love with that pretty face. I'll be jealous, if I can, and you shall do all the apple-getting yourself. Nuns have no right to dream about anything, much less pretty faces. I dare say that there was a man about too, only you won't say."

"Oh! Joan," replied Hilda, "I guess you have been dreaming, too. There was a man close by the sweet one's bedside, but as it was in our infirmary, I didn't like to tell you, for we both know he oughtn't to have been. So it must have been a dream—yet, oh! somehow, Joan, I can't think it was. No, I am sure, yet—I don't know. Oh, I forgot something—not much. She had a daisy—a single tiny little daisy—fastened across her breast, and that man seemed to look as much at the flower as he did at the maid."

"Hilda, you are a strange girl—you really are. Here we've both been in this nunnery four years this Christmas, and you've never told me once before of a single dream—let alone such a dream as this."

"Joan, don't that show that there must be something in it? At any rate I think—I really do think there is. Get along, sweet, and climb that tree, and let's have something

to show, otherwise my Lady will be sure to say we have been wasting our time. I declare I won't pick up the basket until you pelt me with the apple which is on the very highest bough. Come, give me a sweet kiss, dear, and let's forget all about that dream."

Sister kissed sister, and Joan jumps forward and has reached the top branch, only to disturb Hilda's absent-mindedness by the blow of an apple right on the top of her head. Then there was a scream from Joan, and quickly she is down again from the tree. "Oh, Hilda, that blessed dream again! Do you know, outside the porter's gate, I saw two horses covered with white foam, and a man and a woman on each, and on the last horse I saw a maiden dressed in white, and she looked as though she were fainting, for the man had to hold her tight, and they are all trying to get past the porter, through the south-east gate, but Mike won't let 'em in. He said that no man but a priest should enter, and then only by consent of my Lady."

They both ran to the gate, only to see it opened and the horsemen enter.

Mike came running up to the sisters. "Oh, Madame, Madame, I couldna stop 'em. They said that they must come in, or there be death and murder, and being as I was only forty-five last Candlemas, I thought—and they opened the gate themselves. Where's my Lady? I never know'd such a thing afore. I'll go and lock the gate afore somebody else comes."

The Prioress, hearing the commotion and the stamp of horses, came at once to the garden. She was respectfully saluted by the horsemen, who approached her with hats in hand. One woman was holding both the horses, but it could be seen that there would not be much trouble that

way, for both animals were tired out, and trembling with the tremendous pace which had been urged. The lady in white was placed tenderly on the grass.

"My Lady," said one of the horsemen, who was evidently a gentleman, "I am Sir Peter Dutton, of Dutton Hall—not so far, if my memory serves me right, from thy first home at Delamere. I am in the King's service; this monk, although he don't look much like one now, is Father John of the Norton Priory. The elder lady is the mother of the younger one, whom some call Daisy, but her real name is Ida. They are natives of Kingsley, which you will also be acquainted with. We have both travelled this early morning from Halton Castle, where the King—God bless His Majesty !—is now staying."

"Well, Sir Peter," said my Lady, "I am glad, for the sake of old times, to see you and your friends, but this, Sir Peter, is the Nunnery of St. Mary, and by the blessed Virgin and the rules of St. Benedict we cannot entertain or assist you."

"Ah!" said he in reply, "we come not for assistance for ourselves. Father John and I will go on to the Green Dragon, in the city, and manage all right, but these two ladies, my Lady, are women like yourselves. They are in distress. The girl Daisy—I mean Ida—is ill, seriously ill. I fear the worst, and we only ask that she and her mother may be safely housed in your hospitable infirmary pending other arrangements."

"Sir Peter," she said, "you well know we shall be only too pleased to grant your request; but why bring her here? Why not have taken her home to Kingsley, which is much nearer to Halton than this city? I cannot understand it."

"Ah!" Sir Peter courteously replied, "there are, I admit, some complications, but they are very long to tell, and if your Ladyship would permit, as you have done gracefully and generously, Daisy—I forgot—I mean Ida—to be taken up at once to the infirmary, she might have a better chance of life with warmth and nourishment, than lying on the cold damp grass. My Lady, if you will allow me—if you will accept the word of one of His Majesty's knights—I vouch, on my honour, everything is right, and I will tell you all later on, at an hour to suit your Ladyship's convenience."

"Sir Peter," the Prioress answered, "every request you have made is granted. Cheshire, we know, is the seed plot of gentility. My sisters here shall assist you to find hospitality for the maid and her mother, and I hope soon to hear of her speedy recovery to good health. Sisters Joan and Hilda, do you make all arrangements, and see that they be well looked after and cared for in accordance with the rules and traditions of our order."

Never were two sisters more astonished. Hilda just looked at the speck of frail humanity, and whispered to her helpmate, "Joan, it's just the very face." And tears began to flow from poor Hilda's eyes, falling gently, just like sweet dew, on the face she knew again and loved so well.

The dream was true, and Ida—dear Ida—could not for once—just once—amidst all her trials and troubles, have fallen into more loving hands. Soon she was placed in the softest, sweetest bed in the Infirmary—one from which she heard the birds warbling—one where the stream of sunshine could fall upon her face by day, and the golden candles of heaven sparkle by night—and there by her side

was Father John, looking at the daisy flower, which still lived to remind him of his promise and the happiness he once enjoyed.

And there, too, was Ida's mother, looking worn and tired, but holding up bravely, notwithstanding all her trials.

Were these all over at last ?



CHAPTER XVII.

SIR BARNY AND FATHER JOHN.

“And if his name be John, I’ll call him Peter;
For new made honour doth forget men’s names.”

—“*King John*,” Act I., Scene 1.

FATHER JOHN did not stay more than two or three minutes by Ida’s bedside, and even that was only permitted because of the sacred office he held. He, too, was thankful she, at least for a short time, was in a place of safety, and did not wish to keep Sir Peter waiting in the cold with the two horses, which also required food and rest. He therefore gave a farewell look, assuring her mother of his speedy return, and was, with Sir Peter, very shortly mounted and out through the north-west gate of the Nunnery.

“Morning, gentlemen,” shouted Mike as they passed through. A silver coin, thrown to him by Sir Peter, soon satisfied Mike he had done what was right by letting the gentlemen enter. He further promised Sir Peter that if anyone else attempted to enter by force, he would resist to the death, and after that, of course, send to the Green Dragon for assistance!

Sir Peter and Father John walked their horses slowly by the Nuns’ Lane and on to the High Cross in East Gate. Who should be there but Sir Barny, wildly making

inquiries from some of the citizens as to the direction taken by our friends, whose safe arrival has been described. Sir Barny's horse was covered with foam, showing the exertions made to overtake those he was pursuing.

"Man," he stormed, "where are they?"

"Aye, aye, mon, who bin you asken about?"

"Why," said Sir Barny, "a man and a woman—I mean two men and two women."

"Well," said citizen Davis, "there be two men and two women in that their provender shop t'other side o' East Gate."

"You fool—you big fool; how can they be on horseback in a shop?" sharply said Sir Barny.

"You be a bigger fool," cried the citizen. "Who said anything about a horse? Yoon got the mare yersel! Tak' her i'th shop and shoon you be a fool."

Crack went Barny's lash across the fellow's face, and just as quickly was Barny lugged off his horse, and laid sprawling in the street, amidst the jeers of the crowd which had collected. Just then he noticed Sir Peter and Father John on horseback, joining in the laughter.

"Aye, aye," he called out, "there be the robbers; they have run away with my wife. By all the Holy Saints, there be the kidnappers. Citizens, in the King's name, I call for your help. I demand their arrest."

"What art after?" said Davis. "Thou's got bested thysel', and thou'll fill Chester Jail thysel' without thy wife."

"Where have you taken my wife to, Sir Peter?" he asked; to which Sir Peter replied, "I have not taken your wife anywhere. The lady you claim is not your wife,

never has been, and never will be. You are not fit to have a wife."

"Treason ! traitor !" called out Barny. "The King declared she should be my wife, and wife she shall be. Strike me dead, citizens, the King on his oath said she was to be my wife, and this fugitive from His Majesty's service has run away with her."

"Winna hoo come w'out fetchin' ?" called out Davis, "'cause if hoo winna come, maybe hoo dinna want thee. It taks two to be sweethearts, and they munna be two men then."

"Shut up, you fool," called out Sir Barny; "no woman would ever look at thy face: it grins like a Cheshire cat, and a bad one at that."

"Dinna yo' mind, Sir Stick-in-the-Mud, I 'anna got to go and get my wife to come: hoo's that fond o' this grinnin' face o' mine that I dunna hae to shave, wi' her kissing it that much."

This sally provoked roars of laughter at the expense of Barny. Maddened with rage, he mounted his horse, and was about to charge Sir Peter with the lash of his whip, with the view of insulting him, bnt the crowd surrounded Sir Peter and prevented the intended violence.

Addressing Sir Peter, he called out excitedly, "If you, Peter de Dutton, don't surrender the girl to me in two hours' time, it shall be death to you and to her. I'll have her dead or alive."

"Shame ! Shame !" called a chorus of citizens.

At that moment stepped out of the large crowd which had collected together, a man of dark but captivating appearance. He was peculiarly dressed ; he seemed to possess a wonderful self-control, and there was an evident absence of

excitement and passion. He was calm and collected, above the average height, and apparently well educated. There was, however, a peculiar leer about the eyes which it seemed impossible to suppress. By his side hung a sword, which was extremely unusual in the case of a civilian. Apparently he was unknown to the crowd, and, as they knew nothing about him, he had the advantage of nothing being known against him. For all that had been seen, he might have sprung suddenly out of the ground. Drawing his sword, he spoke with a commanding voice.

“Sir Barnaby de Gresford, of His Majesty’s service, I know all thy troubles, and am fully cognisant of His Majesty’s decree that the girl Ida was to be thy lawful wife. That order, which is still in force and binding upon the King and everyone else, must and shall be carried out. These two, whom thou wert lawfully pursuing, with a view of overtaking the maiden, captured her unlawfully and in contravention of His Majesty’s decree. I know where Ida, the Daisy Flower, is. She is thine by right and by law, and if thou wilt accompany me and act according to my directions, the girl shall be yours, yours alone to do as you wish. Quick, follow me, and lose no time.”

All the crowd, including Sir Peter and Father John, were thunderstruck with the outspoken speech and determined air of the stranger. It was a bolt from the blue. The crowd of citizens began to think after all there must be something in Sir Barny’s complaint. The stranger was gone, too, before a reply could be made or a word of explanation given. He seemed to fly through the crowd, which, struck with his commanding presence, made a way for him as though he had been the Devil himself. Sir Barny was quick to follow. Here was just the chance

of his life. Now he would be revenged. Soon Ida would know who was the master ; he would know how to punish her for the insults she had heaped upon him. There should not be any more troublesome journeys running after her. She should learn obedience, and he would rule her with a rod of iron.

Poor Ida !

“No sooner,” thought Father John, “have we overcome troubles and difficulties, and surmounted what seemed the last, but they rise up again, more formidably than ever. How would the poor dear girl survive these endless complications if she knew what was in store for her ?” Turning to his comrade, he asked, almost piteously, “Well, Sir Peter, what are we to do now ?”

“Thrash the Devil !” came the quick reply. “Cheshire men never know what defeat means when the cause is just and right, as this is—Cheshire men will lick the dust to protect the weak and innocent. Think you, Father John, we are going to turn tail on two dissipated hirelings ? No, not if there were a hundred. Citizens,” he cried, with all the vigour and warmth of his Cestrian blood, “you won’t believe the lie of a stranger rather than the honest blunt truth spoken by a Cheshire Baronet, who has lived amongst you all his life, and who tells you—upon his honour—that the girl that Sir Barnaby de Gresford is trying to capture is a young maid from Overton—one of yourselves—and is not the wife of that villain. She hates him like poison. That vagabond stole her from the Priory of Norton, carried her to my Forest of Dutton, all to serve his own selfish purposes, but with the King’s troops I captured her and saved her from disgrace and death. Citizens, what say ye ?”

With a chorus loud enough to reach St. Mary's Nunnery, and a strength of voice, purpose and will which only Cheshire men can show, they sang out, led by Citizen Davis, "To hell with the Devil and all his followers."

"Nay, nay," with a satirical smile, whispered Father John, "it couldn't hold 'em all."

"Well, then," said Sir Peter to the crowd, "see to it your promises are made good. Go to the gates of St. Mary's Nunnery, where the maiden now sleeps, and, without noise or disturbance, keep sentry. See that no violence is used to carry her away—God knows where, if they once get her out of the Nunnery."

"Aye, aye," was the response.

Before they could hurry away, a troop of the King's Horse Brigade could be seen galloping under the East Gate, making straight for the High Cross, where the crowd was collected. Fearing that after all these might be sent to carry out the orders of His Majesty, as declared by the stranger, they stood closer together. Soon they noticed the smiling jolly face of Captain Delamere, who was heartily glad to come across Sir Peter and Father John. A military salute and a sharp "Halt!" brought the Captain and his men to a standstill close to the feet of the crowd.

"Aye, aye, Sir Peter; have you good news?"

Sir Peter, being uncertain with what object Captain Delamere had been despatched, said cautiously, "Aye, Captain, good news and bad news; which would you like?"

"Oh, Sir Peter," he replied, "is there any true English soldier who is not ready for either? If it's bad news, we all fight to the death until it's good news, and when we have got that we don't want the other."

"Well," said Sir Peter, "what sort of news do you want of Sir Barny, and then I shall know what to tell you?"

"Sir Barny!" cried the Captain; "Sir Barny! Who wants to hear any good news of him? If anyone expected it, he could never have it. Sir Peter, I have come, like you did, bravely in advance, to stop the wicked designs of the worst man who has ever worn His Majesty's uniform. How is he? Where is he? Have you seen him? I'd rather gallop my horse across his body, and stick my sword into his neck, than have a mug of Halton ale, although we are all of us dreadfully dry just now. I wonder if there's any here."

"Aye, plenty, Captain," said Sir Peter, "and each honest soldier with you shall taste it."

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" bawled out the crowd.

One citizen said: "Aye, the best ale i' Chester is brew'd by Mester Jayne at the Bishop's Mitre."

"Nay, nay," said Davis, who was a leading authority. "I know summat as'll beat that. I've tried 'em both. I swares, as Sir Peter says—on my word and honour—the very best ale in Chester is brew'd to-day by Mester Adams at the Churton Arms."

"Aye, aye, that's it; thou'st hit the spot; thou'rt a good 'un, and thou owt for know, Davis."

"Well, well," said Sir Peter, "business before pleasure. Go, you free citizens, and act as sentry at all the Nunnery gates, and there's two casks of Jayne's ale for you, and relief as soon as Captain Delamere and his men have partaken of my hospitality. See that the devil don't get there before you."

No word of command was ever executed more promptly. The whole crowd cleared off down the Mercers' Rowe and along Bridge Street, and were soon on guard at the

Nunnery gates. The little group of horsemen were now left by themselves near the High Cross, subsequently destroyed by the Parliamentarians, with that silly destructive vengeance too often exercised some three hundred years afterwards. It was then for the first time that Captain Delamere noticed the presence of Father John, which brought to his remembrance one part of his important mission. Addressing him with a military salute of respect, he said, "Father John of Norton Priory, most holy man, full of zeal, courage, and valour, in all matters religious and secular, when I was by myself attending His Majesty's requirements this morning, I found this letter in the bed upon which the King was then resting. It was addressed to you, so, not knowing, worthy priest, whether it was from the King himself or the Maid of Overton, I took the liberty of taking care of it, so that, on the occasion of my next opportunity, I might hand the same to yourself. It looks as though the address were in His Majesty's handwriting, but having regard to the fact that His Majesty was found on the Maid's bed, I be not certain whether it be from the Maid or the King."

"The King on the Maid's bed! How can that be?" remarked Father John; "how could it be?"

The Captain proceeded to explain the peculiar circumstances which had occurred the previous night, as far as his memory and condition would permit, also the conversation with the Jester, who he stated had done honest good service for once. Father John proceeded to break the seal and read the letter, which was somewhat after the following:—

"Sir,—

"You are known as Father John of Norton.

Priory. I have been informed of your great courage and skill in rescuing the Maid of Overton from violence and brutal hands with the alleged view of taking her to my Abbey of Vale Royal. The monks there have heard of your zeal for the faith and also of your great learning and humility, and to show their approval of your conduct and prove that they did not in any way connive at the detestable crime proposed to be associated with their Abbey, your name has been mentioned for my approval as Abbot of Vale Royal. Although one of the Augustinian order to which you belong should not ordinarily be appointed supreme in a Cistercian Abbey, I, with their full sanction, nominate you to that high office and require your acceptance of the same. I suggest that on taking up the office you assume another episcopal name.

“EDWARDUS SECUNDUS.”

Father John's face was filled with astonishment. He had not sought this appointment; he was of another religious order—the duties pertaining to it might prevent his securing the freedom and protection of his Daisy flower. Like others, upon whom unexpected honours are thrust, he doubted himself. He would have to set an example. He must be without blemish. Was he? Could he carry out the austere rules of the Cistercians and yet—and yet—see Ida? Should he throw away the chance of promotion—he was certainly not ambitious, yet he pictured to himself the semi-regal state of the Abbot with his retinue and retainers. The other side of it was an abandonment of holy vows and a cottage with a simple Daisy flower. Tightly he held the letter of command in his hand, without speaking a word, yet with a mind agitated by diverse and varied thoughts. Slowly and with unusual dignity he

handed the letter to Sir Peter to read, who was equally amazed, and then said :—

“Well, John, you will of course accept it. What makes you think and hesitate? I never saw you in such a solemn mood before except when that water joust was on.”

“Sir Peter, I wanted your opinion. I can’t settle this matter myself. If I go to Vale Royal, I must do my duty to God, my King and the people, and then what is to become of Ida?”

“Why, John, haven’t you always been carrying out those duties all your life? I ain’t met you very long, but I’ve heard of your good name and work afore. As for Ida and her mother, I’ll see that no harm comes to those two as long as I live. They can come and live near my Dutton Hall, and any devil who comes there on one of his foreign expeditions will find his way back quicker than he came.”

“Ah!” chimed in Captain Delamere, “then I didn’t do so much harm in priggish that letter from the King’s pocket. It’s one from Ida and she wants some help. Here it is,” drawing and holding up his sword.

“Show it to the Captain, Sir Peter, will you?” said Father John. After the Captain had read it he exclaimed : “Then it was from the King, and I’ll be bound he was taking it to Ida to relieve her from some anxiety, and to show her that whatever happened to her, you, Father John, would at any rate be all right. Why, I’ll have to style you, ‘My Lord Abbot’ this minute.”

“Oh, you two sinners!” replied John. “I was not thinking about myself; thank God, I never was selfish. I can manage somehow and somewhere or anyhow and anywhere and at all times without the honour and responsibilities of high office. I am quite content to

remain plain, simple Father John, and to be known, loved and respected by the few friends I have here and there met, without assuming the airs of a little king and taking the command of a small army of monks, who, as everybody knows, have, notwithstanding their sacred vows, all the crotchets and cranks pertaining to human nature. Perhaps I could manage those new duties, but though you, Sir Peter and Captain, think I can fight in a good cause and thrash any tyrant I meet, I really prefer our daily life of quiet devotion and study at the Priory, especially with the freedom and trust the Prior always permits and gives me."

"Now, John," said Sir Peter, "this talk is utter nonsense. It is absolutely so. I know there's something else, and though you are the elected Abbot of Vale Royal, go and ask Ida yourself. You can now get admission to the Nunnery any time you like by showing that letter to the Prioress. Go, and God bless you. Remember, if you are the Abbot, you can do a lot more to help Ida than you can simply as Father John."

"Can I? Can I?" said the Father, "That is just what I doubt.

The rules of office bind ;
Hide those we cannot find.
True love no locksmith heeds
And will o'ercome all needs.

Well, I have told you all, more than I should have done. I am only a very poor piece of human nature with all its failings. I will hence and see Ida. But, prithee, Sir Peter, what does the King mean by saying I should take another name?"

"Bless my soul, John, it's only a whim. Take my name—Peter. After all it's more becoming because you know that

you have loved Ida when you shouldn't have done. I am not a fellow to believe that the rules of love can be written down in a book. They can't. Besides, there's love *and* love, and I know you simply adore her, so as to protect and look after her. The King," he added with a knowing twinkle, "may have thought you have been a bit weak in that direction, and to remove all trace of it imagined you'd do better under another name. Bless me! where in the world will you find a greater name than Peter, the name of the blessed founder of our Church, and, just like you, he forgot himself—not once, but three times running."



CHAPTER XVIII.

SIR BARNY ONCE AGAIN.

“To what gulphs,
A single deviation from the track
Of human duties leads.”

—*Byron.*

WHILST my Lord, Father John, goes on his visit to Ida, let us retrace our steps and see what Sir Barny is doing. He and the strange visitor were seen walking together most vigorously over the Rood-eye. They had left the High Cross, and proceeding through Water Street, along the city walls, got on to the flat open meadow land, styled the Roodee (or Rood-eye, as it was then termed), now celebrated for its racecourse. One of the citizens was holding Barny's horse, which was shivering with cold and want of food, preceded, as it was, by the heat of the wild gallop of an hour ago. That, however, was a detail which did not concern his master. Revenge to him was sweet, and meat and drink as well. He had no time to think of himself or his horse being hungry or thirsty. He was feeding upon his thoughts, and he particularly wanted to make a closer acquaintance with the man who seemed to know everything, and who could put him in the way to carry out his plot.

There they were—the one in a mixed, dirty sort of dress, which denoted Royal service, a dungeon and a water joust all rolled into one. Barny did not forget the varied

experience he had recently gone through. He had deprived himself of sleep the night before, for he had to be guard and sentry in his own cause. He felt sure some attempt would be made to deprive him of his lawful prey—the Maid of Overton. His hair was unkempt, his manner slovenly, and his handkerchief wet with the continual mopping of his hairy face, which was full of an uneducated determination, which betokened discontent, despair, devilment and every other “d” besides. The contrast with the stranger was striking. The two seemed like the North and the South Poles assembled in close proximity to each other, and possibly the external cold frigidity of both exemplified the internal heated disposition of each. Yet the stranger appeared by his dress to be the gentleman of the two. Still his costume was peculiar. Black breeches, tight and close fitting, here and there interspersed with stars of some sort of red material. These stars were the more noticeable over the knees, and seemed to form a sort of milky way cluster all round the front hemisphere of this part of the legs. The lower part and his feet were covered, apparently, with hare skins, but tied round, about an inch apart, were different coloured ribbons of costly silk, the bow of each tie always being placed to the front. At the foot of each leg was placed a beautiful buckler of gold, studded with sparkling diamonds, which increased in brilliance as the different movements of the feet caught the rays of the shining sun. Round the waist was a texture resembling cloth of gold. He did not wear any vest, only a shirt of bright green colour, and even this was lightly put on without the trouble of dealing with fasteners or buttons. His coat, too, was loose in the front, a sort of gossamer without warmth, and through which the under-

clothing was distinctly visible. On his head was a cap of red colour, but with two flaps of vivid scarlet, hanging loosely down on each side, and covering the ears. His hair was black as jet, his face clean cut, narrow and shaven. Eyes of steel and hands of iron nearly complete the necessary description of the distinguished personage with whom Sir Barny had made a brief acquaintance.

"Hey, then you know where Ida is?" said Barny.

"Yes."

"And can you take me to her?"

"Yes."

"Is she far away?"

"No."

"Is she in the city?"

"Yes."

"Is she close to?"

"Yes, very close."

"Then why the devil don't you take me to her?"

"Take *you!*"—emphasizing the last word—said the stranger in scornful tone.

"Yes, me," said Barny.

"Why—what for?"

"To see her."

"What do you want to see her for?"

"Because she is my wife; you said so yourself."

"No," was the petulant, quick reply; "whenever you speak to me, tell the truth. I said she was to be your lawful wife. You must first catch your hare before you cook it," looking with pride at the skins he was wearing.

"Well, then, help me to catch her."

"What for—to cook her?"

"Yes—no, to wed her."

“Does she wish to wed thee?”

“Well, a few nights ago she accompanied me half way from Norton Priory to Vale Royal Abbey, where we would have been wed.”

“Went with thee, how—by force?”

“No, on horseback.”

The stranger just touched Barny's shoulder with a grasp he had never felt before. It made him wince with pain. He saw that the stranger was his master, both in strength and knowledge.

“Well, don't do that; it hurts. Say the King decreed her to be my lawful wife, and thou saidst so under the shadow of the High Cross in the city.”

“Don't,” said the stranger, “play your Holy High Cross upon me. I hate it and all pertaining to it.”

“Ah!” said Barny, seeing a loophole of sympathy, “then thou must hate Father John, the friend of the Maid.”

“There be brave men and true, even amongst the monks. Why should I, like thee, hate this Father? He spoiled thy little game of violence.”

“Well, then, stranger, help me because of the King's decree; thou art a loyal subject and doth respect and honour His Majesty's commands.”

“I acknowledge no liege lord. I am no subject of Edward's. He is one of mine, rather than I one of his.”

Barny did not seem to make any headway. The stranger was evidently playing with him like a cat toys with a mouse. If Barny had rope enough he would hang himself. *ins*

“Marry me, stranger,” said Barny, “thou talks funnily. I might take thee to be a traitor. Thou talks enough, but there don't seem to be much thou canst do. I'm off.”

"Do you, knight, or rather knave, see that English flag floating proudly over Cæsar's Tower at the Castle, three hundred yards away? Do you see the lion rampant in one corner? Fetch me the strongest bow you can find in the Castle, and bring with it the stoutest and best archer there. Let him try to follow me."

Barney ran to the Castle, and soon returned with both.

"Well, archer, canst thou hit that lion in the quarter from this spot?" said the stranger.

"Just as impossible as to fly there," was the reply.

"Is the bow strong?"

"Aye, as strong as any man living can bend."

The stranger took the bow and arrow. Just then he seemed to hesitate: instead of the strong stretch, there was a scowl and a shudder. "See you there the Rood Cross?" he exclaimed, pointing to the Rood-eye Cross; "you wretched countrymen, as ignorant as you are base, never appear to have your eyes or wits about you. I saw the cross there roll a pair of eyes at me—I am sure it spoke something which I cannot repeat. Why build such a bugbear in this place?"

"No, no," said Barney; "it can't speak or move. It's stone; it has no eyes to roll."

"Fool!" said the stranger; "every cross speaks and looks and tells a tale of sweating brows, agony and death: if it doesn't, what's it put up for? Go and stand in front of it, otherwise I cannot possibly aim straight nor pull strong."

Barney went and stood on the steps at the base of the cross, so that it was hidden from view. Then the stranger got his aim once more.

With precise aim and enormous pull, the shaft fled right

through the heart of the beast, on—on—over the Castle to the banks of the River Dee, where it was afterwards found.

Both men looked on with astonishment—no such feat had ever been performed before. There was an absence of exertion. It was done with ease, yet it was noticed that when the bow was pulled, the two scarlet flaps over the stranger's ears were inflated and stood up.

"Well!" said the stranger, "can I do anything?"

"Aye," replied Barny, "it seems like it."

The bowman replied, "It's a'most as marvellous as the last news in the city."

"What's that?" said Barny.

"Why, as John of Norton Priory has been made Abbot of Vale Royal."

"Abbot of Vale Royal!" exclaimed Barny; "the devil he has!"

"Aye," said the stranger, "didn't you know that Captain Delamere of Halton brought a letter from the King this morning and offered him the place?"

"No, nor thou either. The Captain is not in the city, so how could he bring a letter to Father John here?"

"Yo' be wrong," said the archer, "I see'd him mysel by the High Cross, nor more than half an hour ago, and Father John be with him too, an' he were holding a piece of paper in his hand then, he was."

"A murrain on ye all! Go," he said to the archer. Turning to the stranger, he said: "Well now, thou be mighty strong. Marry me thou canst do anything. Thou art the strongest man I ever come across. What wilt thou do for me?"

"What do you want doing?"

"Why, anything as 'll get that Father John out of the

way. If he's gone, Ida won't think any more about him, and I'se sure I come next."

"Aye, aye, all very well, Sir Barny; but I don't do something for nothing. What will you give me?"

"Anything you like, every penny I've got and a lot more besides, when I can."

"Reckless Barny, do you think I want your trash? Do I look like a beggar? I can take what I like, get what I want, and live like a King—my payments are not in kind or coin, but souls." The last two words were shouted out wildly and vehemently. The scarlet flaps stood out almost like two horns. The outer cover of gossamer seemed to roll itself into a black tail at the back. Those eyes of steel seemed to glisten with fire, and the long lanky hands of iron assume the appearance of claws.

Barny was on his knees. He saw he had been talking to the Devil himself.

Said the stranger in a harsh commanding tone: "Let me teach thee a lesson. Devilish designs, such as thine, need me to carry them out. The world were nothing without me. I—I alone, make men and women fight and drink and commit murder—but before they do it, they sell themselves to me, body and soul and all. If they tried to do all these things by themselves they would fail. I am with them—in them—part of them—urging them on—because the worse things they do, the tighter they chain themselves to me. Soon they find happiness in the commission of these deeds—which some call wrong—but I do not. It is happiness to me, and soon it is so to them. I do it also for vengeance, because I was once shockingly treated myself. My ambitious ideas could not live in a Heaven so full of restraint. I hated to see anyone superior

to myself. I couldn't bend the knee to the Son of the Maiden Mother. I was cast out. I say that with a sting in every letter—CAST OUT—so I created another world where men—whose nature is such that they must do wrong—who wished to do wrong—would always have a chance of doing it, and would secure happiness in wrongdoing. Did there not grow in the first heaven upon earth a tree—the fruit of which created a knowledge of good and evil? Does not that show that from the very creation there were two parties in the world—the one preferring so-called good; the other so-called evil? I am supreme—the Head—the King—of all evil; but I must first destroy the soul—the mind—the thinking part of the whole machine; for the man or woman who thinks doesn't often go wrong. My people are men and women who don't think. I think for them, and they do what I tell them, because they have no soul, no mind of their own. Men like you, Sir Barny, follow me, too. They commit one sin, and soon they become desperate, offer me all they have got, and want to do something worse, and then I needn't trouble—they are mine for ever and ever. Further, let me tell you, I create dissension and strife whenever I can. I hate those fanatical, feasting monks, who shut themselves up to avoid seeing me, but sometimes I pass in disguise through their gates and peep into their cells, and you know, Sir Barny, how I got the monk Kingston to help you. I did it, because I found out that when he was supposed to be on his knees praying or counting his beads, he was not thinking at all, and I would just whisper something in his ear, deprecating the Prior or the Order, and making him discontented, all of which he would listen to. I put it into your head to kill him,

and now he is mine. I feed upon discontent. Here's this Father John—a most happy man, who tries to make others happier than himself—one of my most dangerous enemies, but I know his weakness. Now I doubt my success, for he is unfortunately appointed Abbot of Vale Royal. It will give him greater opportunities of doing good. I must upset his precious designs, and just as I waged war in Heaven and got thousands to follow me, so I must wage war against this John and all he does. As I said before, it is difficult to pierce the cell of a praying monk, and these Cistercians are so close-minded, so rigid in having nothing to do with the outer world, that I have fully decided that any attack must be on the outside of this religious fortress—not inside. Dost thou agree, my Barney ? ”

He accompanied this verbal demand with such a sharp slap upon Barney's shoulders that he rose up, crying with pain. “ Oh, Lord ! Do whatever thou wilt, but plague upon your blows. Thou canst have all I have and own, but deal as sharp a blow on that Abbot as thou hast given me, and he will bellow like myself.”

“ Well, then, to business,” was the reply. “ I know Father John is hesitating about accepting the appointment, but I am sure he will take it, and be installed with due respect, pomp and ceremony. There is, a short distance from the Abbey, a Church at Over which the monks love, indeed it belongs to the Nunnery of St. Mary's over yonder, where Ida is located. I propose to remove it—carry it away bodily. Thus will a double blow be dealt to the Abbey and the Nunnery. You doubt my power to do this—well, you have seen me shoot an arrow—just as easily will I shoot one church on to the top of another, and so

destroy both. There is another Church at Nantwich which has taken years to build ; I will carry Over Church to Nantwich, and tumble them both down like a pack of cards."

"Impossible!" said Barny, going on his knees again with awe and astonishment. "Impossible!" he repeated.

"Ah, Brother Barny, I have only one weakness, and that proves my strength. Until the Son of that Maiden Mother came on this earth, men and women offered sacrifices of animals thinking to please the personage called God, and vainly imagined the curling smoke would take their prayers to Heaven. I was making headway then, for there was little to oppose me. Afterwards, Christ the Son came here, telling the people how to live, what to believe, and performing greater miracles than I could. I tried to capture Him, offered Him the whole world if He would only fall down, as thou doest now, to worship me, but He would not. They hung Him on a Cross, and people were told, and believed, that if they looked to that Cross they would go to Heaven and be happy there. I tried it once myself, but turned away with a shudder. I hate the very sight of a cross, and my hatred is my weakness. The very sight of it makes me shiver, and my strength all disappears."

"Well," said Barny, "I have no cross about me except the blow thou just gave me and which pains me even now. However, a minute ago, thou saidst that Ida was in that Nunnery over there ; why can't we go there and see her ? Possibly Father John may be there too."

"Ah ! I knew what you were going to say. Why, that Nunnery is full of crosses ; every sister wears one, there is one over the bed where Ida lies. Father John carries one

about with him. Did I not tell you that in the presence of the Cross I am weak like you? Meet me at Over Church, after the Abbot has been installed, and we will carry away his most valued treasure. We will create discontent within the Abbey, for those Cistercian monks will naturally and reasonably conclude that such an event—unlooked for and unexpected—has been brought about by this new appointment from another Order, and if I can once make them unhappy, dissensions will arise, John's power for good will be gone, and soon there won't be a stone standing of that celestial pile which now adorns the banks of the Weaver. Thy duty will be to see that no cross adorns the outside of Over Church; if there is one, I can't do it. I do not mind if my weakness comes on with any crosses outside Nantwich Church, for the greater the fall the bigger the smash."

There was a sound of whirling wind, a noise like thunder, a flash like lightning. Barny found he was alone.



CHAPTER XIX.

IDA.

“Farewell at once : for once, for all, and ever.”

—*Shakespeare.*

“THE Lord Abbot of Vale Royal standeth hereabout, my Lady, and desireth to see thee,” said one of the sisters of St. Mary’s Nunnery to Dame Marie.

“The Lord Abbot !” she exclaimed with surprise, “I thought he was dead and no intimation hath been sent to us of any new appointment, or of his intention to visit us, as hath hitherto been customary. Doth he inform thee of his intent and business without notice ?”

“No, my Lady,” was the reply, “and he hath no retinue or a single follower with him. Moreover, my Lady, his dress be that of a mere monk, and that not of the best order. But he sayeth he be the Lord Abbot, and methought I had better inform your Ladyship than refuse so high a personage the right of entry to your presence.”

“You are quite right, Sister Agnes,” said Dame Marie, “but will you sweetly tell him that he cometh here without appointment, or notice, and I would fain be favoured with his company on another day, to be appointed between us. Don’t offend his Lordship, whatever you do ; say we are not fit or prepared to receive so distinguished a guest.”

Sister Agnes disappeared, but soon returned with the

message that the Abbot would wait her Ladyship's convenience in the common parlour.

"Oh ! but, sister Agnes, we cannot possibly keep him there. If his business be so urgent, bring him hither and do thou wait with me to show him respect as well as myself."

Soon the sister returned once more, bringing with her the Lord Abbot. When he entered the Prioress's room she was startled.

"Thou the Abbot of Vale Royal ! Why, this early morn thou wert introduced by my friend, Sir Peter de Dutton, as a Father of the Priory at Norton, and thy dress betokeneth that order. How comes it that thou now claimest to be the Lord Abbot of Vale Royal, than whom there is no more powerful Prelate in Cheshire ?"

"My Lady, you have stated but the truth, and possibly I may not be the Abbot, or perhaps I may be. Of one thing I am quite certain : I feel not to be worthy of that high office. It was with a view of seeking advice on that very subject I came hither, and I trust it will not be denied me."

"Certainly, Father," said the Dame, "thou must know whether thou be the Lord Abbot or not. What proof have I of this claim ? Possibly the long and extraordinary journey thou hadst this morning may have made thee think more highly of thyself than thou oughtest to do, or possibly the short sleep thou mayst have had at the Green Dragon, with the abundant consequences of a visit there, may have caused thee to dream of thy promotion. By St. Mary, thou must give me some better proof than thy mere word."

"My Lady, your words do not surprise me. It is His

Majesty's will and pleasure that I should accept this high office, but my prayers, thine own, and those of others who know me well are needed, so that I may be sure that I am fitted, and that the offer which hath been made meets with the sanction and approval of the King of Kings. Here be the letter of our own King, but that be to my mind only one step, and not the most important."

My Lady perused the letter, then she looked for a few moments at Father John, carefully scrutinising his features, but neither spoke.

Silently, and with graceful dignity, she rose from her seat, knelt down, and kissed his hand. "My Lord Abbot," she rose and said, "what be thy requirements? I knew thee a few short hours ago as a beggar, now thou art a Prince in our community; there be but one qualification—that thou be as good as thou be great."

"Yes, my Lady," was the simple, heartfelt reply. What a struggle there was within—not a struggle for power, for wealth and office, but a conflict of humility with fitness, of capacity with example. Father John turned the search-light of truth upon his inner conscience, and the glare displayed so many unknown defects, so many unlooked for deficiencies, so many causes for humiliation and thought, he almost gasped for breath at the thought of his own shortcomings and the serious responsibilities of office. Yet there were still other thoughts as before; none of which the world knew. They were locked up in his own disturbed breast, and again there was only one word which betokened them all.

It was Ida. It was the love and honour of Ida pitted against the love and honour of God. It was a struggle he alone knew of; he alone could solve it; he must be his

own mentor ; one must conquer the other, and he somehow wished both to win, but it couldn't be. Modern biography tells us that Ruskin loved a lady, but declined to marry her, unless she wrote and told him that she loved Jesus Christ more than himself. She refused, and nobly sacrificed herself at the altar of Truth.

What will John do ? He was aiming at a perfection which surpassed human nature. He was to be the living representation of the living Christ in the great monastery. Was he fit ?

A tear fell upon the tippet of his cowl, which did not pass unnoticed by my Lady. There was, she thought, sufficient humility, an excess of generosity, but would there be force of character, or a want of firmness, a toleration of inexactitude, fatal in a large monastery of the Cistercian Order ?

She, too, was aiming at the impossible—a perfect Abbot—an earthly saint. She suggested, with a view of testing his capabilities, an inspection of the Nunnery, to which Father John readily assented, knowing that this would necessitate his going to the Infirmary, without his expressing a desire to do so.

They left my Lady's Parlour—or as it is sometimes called, the Locutorium, because it was the place where necessary matters of business with my Lady were discussed, and proceeded to the Library. He inspected the histories, Missals, illuminated and ecclesiastical manuscripts, which were here and there placed in the cupboards.

“Ah, my Lady,” he said, “you have here a very valuable collection, but I do not see the ‘*Annales Cestriensis*,’ which was written in the year 1255, containing a most notable account of interesting events since the birth of Christ, and telling us of many historical

circumstances connected with this city of Chester. It also contains an account of the city's great Earl, Randolph Blundeville—Randolph the Good—who was as celebrated in his time as any of the seven champions of Christendom, and, my Lady, that manuscript was written in the year in which Hugh of Lincoln was so foully murdered by the Jews. You must have heard of him."

"Oh, my Lord Abbot," she replied, "you touch the tenderest strings of my heart by that reference; it was only last night at the Collation I was reading of Hugh to the Sisters, and there was never an eye without a tear. The man who knows and appreciates that story must be a good man."

"Ah, Lady, how could it be otherwise? Austerity without meekness is not good for the soul. Before, however, I forget, I must remind you that there is now in St. Werburgh's Monastery in this city a very clever young monk, named Ralph Higden, who is now engaged in writing a most extensive work, he intends to style "The Polychronicon." It is a chronicle of universal history. He only took his vows at St. Werburgh's about twenty years ago, but I heard the other day he had written all known of the history of the world up to the death of King David. It may take twenty or thirty years more to finish it, because he is trying to make it as correct and complete as possible, so that it will be a book to be remembered and treasured hundreds of years hence. If I do accept His Majesty's commands, I may hope to have the honour of knowing more of this clever young monk, whereas he, perhaps, wouldn't receive me as Father John. What do you think?"

"Oh, my Lord, it is not for me, a mere woman, yet with

a title, to express an opinion. I am sure you are good enough, and now I know you are wise enough. I have never heard of this Ralph before, and it seemeth strange that I should not have done so, living in the same city, whereas you, who live so far away, appear to know all about him."

"Well, my Lady, there may possibly be some reason for my knowledge. On the occasion of the King's visit to Norton, the Prior determined to impress His Majesty by the performance of some of your Mystery Plays, and for the purpose of assistance and guidance he asked the Abbot of St. Werburgh's to let young Higden come and help us. It was during the rehearsals I made his acquaintance, and he confided to me the intelligence with which you are now acquainted, but which is not generally known."

"Ah, then, my Lord, you have had a Mystery Play at Norton. Which was it?"

"The Nativity."

"And who represented the Holy Mother?"

"Ah, there, perhaps, you will be a little interested, for the dear girl you have now in your infirmary was to have been the Virgin."

"What! this Ida, you brought here this morning?"

"Yes," replied the Abbot.

"What do you mean by saying she was to have been the Virgin?"

Then John had to give a long explanation, telling all that had taken place, of the capture and retaking of the maiden, of the water joust, the result, and of their flight to Chester.

My Lady was most interested; repeatedly she requested fuller details, and the tears began to flow, convincing John

that Ida would now have a sincere friend and protectress in Dame Marie. At last she said, "You did not tell me the part you took in the play of the Nativity."

"I—I—I—was Joseph, the husband of Mary," was the simple yet comprehensive reply.

"Ah, then," she said, "I quite understand your interest in the girl. It is your duty as well as your privilege to look after her, and you can do it better as Abbot of Vale Royal than as Father John."

"Do you really think I can?" he asked.

"Certainly. Why do you hesitate?"

"I just want to ask *her*. I wish to know what *she* thinks. I will be guided by what *she* says," said John, with head bent and hands and heart beating with joy. He knew he had won over the tender sympathy of my Lady. He had led her right to the point at which he wished to arrive. It was such a relief to find that she was on his side that he felt as though half the battle was already won.

"Go," said my Lady, "and see Ida, and by virtue of your holy office and in token of my confidence, you shall do what never hath been done here before—you shall see her alone, so that she can tell you in her own words, and with her own lips, that which she has to say; but come back and tell me your decision. And may God and the Holy Mother bless you and help you to a wise choice. I repeat again, I know you are a good man; now I further am sure you are a wise man. I can see you are not accepting this office for the purpose of worldly power and glory, but to exalt and praise God as far as you are able to do so. Few men are like you."

John proceeded from the Library by the east side of the

cloister garth, through my Lady's Parlour, along a covered passage to the door of the infirmary. Here he halted, for he heard voices within.

"An' do you know, Joan, Sweet Face is a lot better than she was this morning. I stripped her so quietly of those wretched damp things she had on. Fancy her—that sweet one—lying on that damp hard grass whilst those two brutes were talking to my Lady! It was enough to cause every bone in her little body to ache."

"An' you were there, Hilda, and prithee, good sister, you did nothing!"

"Nay, but then, I say, I daredn't until my Lady told me."

"An' the men daredn't either. I shall stick up for the men. I suppose you'll stick up for Sweet Face and say you daredn't do a good deed until you were told to do it. I hope she's good as well as sweet."

"Aye, that she is," said Hilda, "for after I'd put her in some warm hair clothing, and washed her pretty face and combed her long locks—and given her a kiss too—she looked up just like the morning sun, an' such a big shine too; so I said to her, 'I don't know what to call you—you ought to be called "Sunshine," but I don't suppose I'm right.' So she said, 'Call me Daisy; I love that name,' so I called her "Daisy," and gave her another kiss, and, just fancy! she gave me one too. But I won't believe that dream's true—really true—until I see that man—he looked like a priest—by her bedside looking at her quite as sweet as I do. There Joan, that's one for your men. What do you say now?"

"It's an improvement, Hilda, although I say it who should not. I'd like to see that man, just to make the

dream complete—not for any other reason, you know. I'm sure he must have been a bit handsome or you wouldn't want to see him. Wasn't he now, Hilda?"

"Bless you, Joan, the one I saw in my dream—remember, it's only a dream—was the handsomest looking man I ever saw in Cheshire, and that's saying a lot. But there, you know, Joan, my vision is rather restricted—at least, I mean I've not seen half so many men as you."

Joan, then being in a merry mood, full of joy at her patient's progress, gave Hilda a bit of a poke with a dainty little finger, against a dainty little bone in the side, and she sprang back suddenly against the outer door, causing it to spring open, revealing John standing outside. The colour came to the cheeks of all three, for the rules of St. Benedict did not, could not, prevent blushing. Blushing is a suffusion least seen where most required. The two sisters rushed off to Ida's bedside, who, when she looked at the cause of their fright, brimmed over with sweet smiles, especially when John came timidly and noiselessly over the rushen floor to the place where she lay.

"Father John," she said, "how good and sweet of you to come and see your little daisy flower!"

"I know not now whether I be Father John or not," he said somewhat austere.

"Ah, then," she said, "what's it matter about your name? You'll always be just as good. Have those wicked men deprived you of your robes of office, because you looked after a daisy flower? Surely there's no harm in that!"

"No—no harm, perhaps, in that for Father John, but—but an Abbot should devote all his time—his life—and every atom about him to Christ and Christ alone."

“Yes—yes,” said Ida sweetly, “but then you are not an Abbot, an’ I’m not going to let you be one.”

“I am the Lord Abbot of Vale Royal—if—if—I like to be—if you think I should be.”

“Oh!” said the sisters, exclaiming together, their faces losing the sweetness of nature and assuming the stiffness and frigidity of ceremonial. Both of them stepped to where John was standing and, like my Lady, knelt down and kissed his hand.

“That, Ida,” he said, “is the difference of names, but thank God, not of natures.”

Ida—poor Ida!—buried her face beneath the bedclothes, and John could hear the sobs and tell the tears were falling fast. Poor John! Poor Ida! Troubles once more—and for both!

At a sign from John, the sisters retired, he informing them that my Lady desired him to speak to Ida alone.

Now he was left with the Daisy. The white petals were no longer expanded, for the sunshine had disappeared. The brimming smile had gone, and, instead, there seemed almost a lifeless figure covered with the last cerement cloth. He seated himself in a rushen chair near the head of the bed and remained perfectly still and quiet. The infirmary hall seemed as though it might be empty, for Ida’s mother had been removed to the guest-house, and was only permitted to see her darling occasionally, in accordance with the rules of the Nunnery.

He waited, and waited—minutes seemed like hours. Presently there came slowly peeping from under the clothes, and near to where he was sitting, a tiny, dainty little hand. He just as slowly stroked it once or twice, then placed it in his own, which was not much, if any,

larger. There was no response to his slight pressure. He must wait. No words passed. He was still looking vacantly into open space ; his thoughts were chaotically mixed. He was waiting for the return of love and life. Presently there was a slight playful movement of two little fingers ; and another two fingers began a responsive motion in return ; then there was a tiny bit of pressure and its return ; this was followed by a squeeze, which was also met with an equally excessive exertion.

Then Ida suddenly brushed on one side the covering, showing a face warm and winning. And John looked.

We have read and heard of " Songs Without Words ; " the dead Latin language reminds us of " *Facta non verba* " and the silent prayer at all times and to-day is more powerful than the spoken. It is the speech of the soul. There is the look which tells of love, of hate—of joy, of sorrow—of a broken vow and a broken heart. The face is invariably the truer and better mirror—the biggest tell-tale the world knows, and, contrary to general principles, the truest. John's was a conflicting look which betokened the struggle within. The terrible temptations of high office were pitted against the lowly, humble post he now held ; his undoubted love of Ida—against the rules of his Order ; the love of Christ—against the love of a woman. Strong man that he was, he hesitated—he required guidance, and he came to weak woman for it. He knew at least her words would be true, so he left her to decide which scale should go up and which down.

But Ida did not speak ; she, too, only looked at him. She knew quite well the great difference to herself in case the fine head and face, looking so earnestly and intently at her, was crowned with an Abbot's mitre and his loving

hand grasped the crozier. She quite recognised that a slight breach of discipline might be overlooked in the case of Father John, but would not be tolerated for a single moment in a Lord Abbot. He would be the observed of all observers. She knew that a single tear would, like a flood, drown the ambitious ideas which he must naturally foster, now that distinction, riches, power and glory were all within his reach.

True, by his high calling, he could the more glorify Christ the Saviour, sing his "O Alma redemptoris mater" with all the greater courage, and, by his example, be a great shining light to others; but would he? Would the change from the valley of comparative mediocrity to the pinnacle of fame lead to the abandonment of that love of genuine truth and spiritual zeal with which his name had hitherto been associated?

It was a sort of House of Lords puzzle, where the coroneted commoner sits in the gilded chamber, far above the heads of the people whom he helps to rule. His views are changed, the balance of his mind is equalised; but too often popular prejudice considers he "passes by on the other side."

The real question was, who was to make the sacrifice—John or Ida? Was she—a mere woman—to stop in the way of him—a mere man—being made a Lord Abbot—one of the highest spiritual and temporal offices in the land? Was she to thwart the command of the King? Yet she knew she had the power. How would she exercise it? Could it be managed both ways? Could he be Lord Abbot and yet love Ida?

Even if it were so, it could never be anything more, as she had fondly and secretly hoped. She thought of the

dear walk and talk they had had together when he took her to the Priory to learn the part of the Holy Virgin, when he picked up the little flower and said to her so simply and lovingly: "Thou art my Daisy," and she had asked him to be the big shining Sun, and thus afford light and heat to the common little flower. Did she not then hear him say—"I will be thy Sun; thou shalt be my Daisy"? and, whether right or wrong, were not little Daisy lips then dipped deep into a beautiful bath of sunshine?

The first and only kiss! Was that to be the last? If he were Lord Abbot, it must be so. She could not imagine so high a personage being in love, or giving her a kiss, any more than a learned Lord Chancellor. And yet the force of nature, the power of love, has made both bend. Still, they both looked at each other without uttering a word.

Then she gently placed her tiny little hand in his, and with the least pressure pulled down his manly face to her own, until sweet lips once more touched. She whispered, "My King!" and he "My Queen!" He took from round his neck, and from the front of his heart, his dearest treasure—a little ivory cross—on which was beautifully cut and carved the figure of the Man Who had made the sacrifice of His own life for both—for all; then with tears streaming down both cheeks he gently and lovingly placed it round her own neck, and on her own breast, saying, "Ida, thou art my Daisy, I will be thy Sun." He was gone!

"She boldly grasped the cross she had to bear,
And sweetly kissed the one she loved to wear."

CHAPTER XX.

THE CALL.

"A man on earth He wandered once,
All meek and undefiled;
And those who loved Him said "He wept,"
None ever said He smiled;
Yet there might have been a smile unseen,
When He bowed His holy face I ween,
To bless that happy child."

—*Mrs. Browning.*

"I WILL be thy Sun." But the light had gone. It was darkness now, Would it ever be light again? Would the warmth of touch ever return and make the life blood flow quickly so that the heart may respond in rhythmic beats?

And what would happen when the Sun was away? Our Daisy must have light and warmth, or shrinkage and death would follow. The beautiful red cheeks would become pale and colourless; energy and action would disappear; lifeless inactivity would supervene.

Our Daisy wondered, too, how the bright glowing Sun would shine without the sympathetic response of the Daisy; it would be like a paper globe, without heat or life—no daisies—not a single flower to laugh back again or to thank his Majesty, the Sun, for shining so coldly. At any rate she could think of him. She could dwell upon his words. She could picture him sitting closely to her bedside, as he had done. Yet it was all like an echo—a shadow—it did not exist. There was no reality. Her

eye saw the picture of the hand, yet her fingers could not feel the touch. Had she not, only a few minutes ago, covered her face with the coarse coverlet of her bed, so that she could not see the Sun—a sight she would give worlds for now, but he had gone!

And so it is, all the world over—ever since the creation; real love is richest, deepest, purest and strongest, when the loved one has gone. Is it not so in the ethereal world? Are not the rays of the setting sun brighter, more glorious, when shafts of red and gold and crimson steal up from below the horizon and paint a sky picture never to be copied?

The soliloquy of love is thought of the past—remembrance of detail—a microscopical examination of every action—a dissection and study of why it was done. He, or she, has said something—why was it said? what did it mean? and every reason is given other than the common-sense one!

Love is the tyrant of the heart; it darkens reason, confounds discretion, is deaf to counsel.

It runs a headlong course to desperate madness. And just so that these love-dreams and pictures might not be disturbed, poor lone Ida covered her face once more—to talk to him—to press unseen the cross to her lips—to try to sleep herself into a dream—with a big wide world, and she and John together, and alone. It was the next best, the only sweetness she could get. And then there came stealing into the chamber another sort of love—an unselfish love—another's need. A love which did not simply think of its own happiness—whose atoms of love were not concentrated on one individual—a sun which shone for more than a single daisy!

It was Sister Hilda Kyle—the dreamer—who entered and disturbed the silent stillness of roving reverie.

“Well, where’s my sweet Sunshine?” she said as she playfully pulled down the clothes. “What, dear! have there been clouds and a shower of rain? Well, never mind, Daisy. My Lady says that I am to look after you as much as I like, and get you well again as soon as ever I can, and as there’s no one else here, you shan’t be left by yourself, and I’m going to sleep in this very next bed and see you off to sleep and get a good rest. The Lord Abbot must be wondrous kind. He left special instructions with my Lady that you were to be well cared for, and he hopes you will be all right when he comes again, which, I understand, won’t be long.”

“Is he coming again?” said Ida.

“Sure,” was the reply, “any Scotch woman could see that he was head and ears in—no, I oughtn’t to say that, though I dreamt it too—I mean, of course, that he wants you to get better, and as he is my Lord Abbot, why shouldn’t you be my Lady Superior? Now I’ll wash your tears away and comb your pretty hair, and after that you shall have some hot gruel and tumble off to sleep and dream like I did before you came here.”

“Sister Hilda, what did you dream about? You never told me,” said Ida.

“Didn’t I tell you, Miss Mischief? Why, I dreamt about you and the Father, before I ever saw you, and I saw you both, just as plain as my own shadow in the sweet Kyles of Bute.”

“You did?”

“Yes, of course I did. But what’s that round your neck? I didn’t dream of that, and I haven’t seen it

before. Oh! what a sweet cross! Wherever did that come from?"

Ida simply blushed.

"I see," said Hilda. "The Father has left this, not only as a keep-sake, but to remind you that the Son of the Holy Mother had many crosses to bear, and that we, Sisters and Nurses, who look after the sick, have to try to make the troubles of others as light as a feather, if we can; that we are to make every sacrifice—even that of life—in the discharge of our duties. So when you look at your cross, think of the Son of Man who gave up His own life to heal and save the whole world. We try to copy his example, but sure they do it better in the South than up yonder in the North, where I come from, for there they want to get to heaven without giving a sixpence or leaving their own doorstep, but they can't."

Returning once more, Hilda said, "Now here's the hot gruel, so you take it and you will soon be asleep and dream that you are quite well and that Hilda Kyle is giving you a sweet kiss."

Day followed day, and week succeeded week, and shortly Ida was able to leave her bed and the infirmary. What was she to do? Her mother had returned home to Kingsley, feeling quite satisfied that she was being well attended to and would soon be quite well. One morning she was sent for by the Lady Prioress to go to her parlour.

"Well, Ida," said my Lady, "are you feeling quite well and happy now?"

"Quite well, thank you, my Lady," was the qualified reply.

"But I suppose not quite happy, Ida. I can understand that, for we have not given you anything to do, because I

wished to afford you time for reflection, so that you might not decide hastily. The real question for you to consider is whether you return home or stay with us."

"I think—I think—I should like to do both," said Ida.

"Ah! but, Ida dear, that cannot be. Christ and the Holy Mother want all of you, not a part. Don't you remember Jesus said, 'And everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father or mother, or wife or children, or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold and shall inherit everlasting life'?"

"Oh, yes," said Ida, "I could give all those up for the love of Christ, but—but——." And then she stopped; she could proceed no further.

"But what, Ida? I thought that verse included every body worth thinking about," said my Lady.

"Well, perhaps it does," replied Ida, "but—but—it doesn't include—you—and it doesn't include Father John—who—who—saved my life. Ought I to give him up?"

"Ida, you are somewhat strange," said my Lady; "the verse really means that Christ expects you to give up everything you value and go and follow Him. True, Father John, as he then was, has been exceedingly kind and good to you, and has done a lot for you, but you don't hesitate to give up your mother for Christ's sake, so you can't hesitate about Father John, notwithstanding all his goodness. Besides, he has himself had to give up everything in the same way, and now he is to be Lord Abbot. I must tell you of the rule of our founder, St. Benedict, which says:—'An Abbot who is worthy to have charge of a monastery ought always to remember by what title he is called,' and that 'there he is considered to represent the person of Christ, seeing that he is called by His name.'"

"But, my Lady," said Ida, "do you think that Father John has given up everything, and—and—everybody?"

"Certainly, my child; how can he think of anything or anybody but Christ and yet be Lord Abbot of Vale Royal?"

"I'm so sorry, my Lady, I can't understand. I always thought a Lord Abbot had a lot to do with money and property, and was very rich and powerful. Does he always think of Christ and never about his tenants and his rents? Doesn't his money put the thought of Christ out of his head now and then? Besides, if he thinks of his property and power, don't you think, my Lady, that he sometimes thinks about people he has met? For instance, will he always be thinking of Christ and never once—of—of—you, or—or—me? I only just want to know."

My Lady looked with astonishment at the maiden. "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin." "Yes; well, Ida, if he thought of you he would only be acting like Christ, for He thought of everyone and died to save us all—and if I remember rightly, Father John risked his life to save you. Of course he must think about you, and he wants you to think of Christ, and he, as Lord Abbot, is, as I told you, a personal representative of Christ. The more you love him, the more you love Christ."

"Ah, then, my Lady, I will love Christ, but you must teach me how to separate one from the other. It seems so difficult to love both, and that is what I want to do, and I shan't know which to love best, shall I?"

"Certainly you will, Ida; the Lord Abbot knows that love and homage is given and paid to him as the representative of Christ and not to himself personally."

"It is difficult—very difficult to understand—perhaps

I don't want to ; but however, my Lady, I will try. I'm not sure I shall manage it. Father John was so good and I'm afraid of all this money and power changing him, especially when I am not near. I suppose, my Lady, as he represents Christ, I may go and see Christ now and then when I can be spared ? ”

“ Ida,” said my Lady, “ you are a strange girl, but we'll try and see what can be done. You see, my dear, in order to join us, you must first enter as a novice ; then at the end of two months, the law of the Order will be read to you and you will again decide whether you wish to stay or go. If you stay, it will be for six months. At the end of that time, if you still desire to be received into our Order, you will have to present a petition, in writing, stating your desire. At the end of twelve months after your petition has been received, you can leave us if you wish or you can be received as a member of the Convent. For that purpose you must make your request before the High Altar in the presence of all of us : ‘ *Suscipe me Domine, secundum eloquium tuum, et vivam. Et non confundas me in expectatione mea.* ’ After this you will be consecrated by the Bishop, or, possibly, the Lord Abbot of Vale Royal, who knows you so well, might be induced to come over for that purpose. +

“ Oh, my Lady,” said Ida, “ do you really think he would come ? Do you think I shall ever be good enough for a Lord Abbot to come specially to receive me into the sisterhood ? ”

“ Ida, you can try ; none of us are as good as we ought to be, but you must have faith and courage. God Himself will help you.”

“ And this dear cross will help me too,” said Ida.

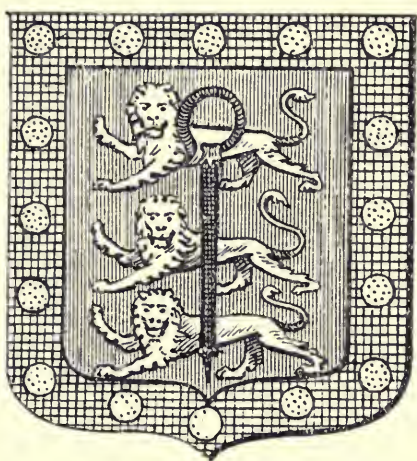
CHAPTER XXI.

THE ABBEY OF VALE ROYAL.

“Here man more purely lives ; less oft doth fall ;
More promptly rises ; walks with stricter heed ;
More safely rests ; dies happier ; is freed
Earlier from cleansing fires, and gains withal
A brighter crown.”

How can we picture the historic pile of the great Abbey of Vale Royal ? Scarcely a sculptured stone remains to tell the tale of its magnificence. How fondly the monks or the masons who chiselled each block sought to breathe life into the inanimate marble picture of their patron saint, the Holy Virgin ! See, there is the face of maternal love ; eyes full of deepest pity ; an expression of pious sorrow ; each finger with its delicate tip, a model of art, copied possibly from the finest of designs on the Acropolis of Athens. We see the stately pile, with the same moon as that which shines for us, casting its light and forming shadows on the green sward around. We see the tower in the centre, although high, still apparently low, to betoken that modesty and humility always associated with buildings erected by those patient hard-working Cistercian monks. For some sixty or seventy years they toiled to make the Abbey perfect ; the skilled art of the world worked there ; the beautifully coloured windows which adorned the nave, choir and presbytery—exquisite in design and execution—

were all executed by loving hands working on the sacred spot. The red sandstone with which it was built was excavated from the Abbey quarry at Eddisbury, brought thither in carts, some with wheels bound with iron, some not so bound. The work was one of faith and love rather than a mere mercenary business. One writer says: "The building was instinct with speech, a tree of life planted in



ARMS OF VALE ROYAL ABBEY.

[Taken from Tanner's "Notitia Monastica."]

paradise, sending its roots deep down into the crypt; rising with stems in pillar and shaft; branching out into boughs over the vaulting; blossoming in diaper and mural flora; breaking out into flower, foliage, and fruit, on corbel, capital and boss." The main building was the church upon the northern side, and with its nave and north and south transepts was to all a representation of the Cross of Christ. The northern cloister walk stretched along the southern



Alf Cook, Ltd, Leeds & London.

A view in Our Lady's Wood at Dale Royal.

wall of the nave, terminated at the south transept, thus affording, with the buildings of the choir and presbytery, protection from the east wind. The most important part of the church was the presbytery, corresponding to our chancel, where was erected the High Altar, the foundation stone of which was laid by King Edward I. Here all, or nearly all, public services were performed. Privacy was secured for the monks by gates of ironwork across the aisle above the presbytery and in a line with the choir screen. The presbytery, or choir, was for the professed brethren, and the western part for the lay brethren, tenants and labourers. The choir was entered from a door in the southern wall of the church at the junction of the northern and eastern walls of the cloister. At the western end of the same northern cloister there was another door leading into the church, reserved for the more solemn processions. In the centre of the choir stood the great raised lectern or reading desk, from which the lessons were chanted and from which also the singing was directed by the cantor and his assistant. The stalls were arranged in three rows, slightly raised one above the other. The Abbot and the second in command occupied the two stalls on each side of the main entrance furthest from the altar, the juniors being ranged nearest. On the celebration of the sacrifice of the Holy Mass, the Abbot and the elders took their places nearest the altar for the purpose of making the necessary oblations at the Holy Sacrifice. Besides the great lectern of the choir there was a second standing desk for the purpose of reading the gospel at Mattins, placed near to the steps of the presbytery. Besides the High Altar, there were in different parts of the church numerous smaller altars. The Abbey Church, we now

know, was the longest in this country belonging to the Cistercian order, being some 400 feet from extreme east to west. Its magnificence is attested not only by the Abbey Leger, but also by the large size of the stone mullions which have been recently examined, some lying in the Park, others in Our Lady's Wood. Most of the stones bear the masons' marks, and these marks can now, unfortunately, be discovered up and down the Vale Royal estate, proving somewhat conclusively how the holy pile has been ruthlessly pulled down and the stonework used in many instances for purely secular purposes.

Next in importance to the church were the cloisters. The four walls of the cloister formed the dwelling-place of the monks, and even here we have favourite walks and seats. The north cloister walk, with its openings looking south, was the warmest of the four divisions. Next to the door of the church and on the western side of the door, was the Prior's seat, and the rest of the seniors in their order sat after him, not necessarily in order of seniority, but in the positions which best suited their work. The Abbot's place was somewhat apart from the rest. He had his fixed seat at the end of the eastern cloister nearest to and on the eastern side of the church door. Thus we have the Abbot and his Prior occupying separate seats, each near the door. In the same eastern cloister, but more towards the other or southern end, the novice master taught his novices, and the walk immediately opposite, namely the western side of the cloister, was devoted to the junior monks. The southern walk, which was sunless, and therefore the cold side of the quadrangle, was not generally occupied. Close to this walk and on the southern side of it was the refectory—sometimes called the

fratry, or fraterhouse—the common hall for the meals of the monks. There was a lavatory near, as also the aumbries, or cupboards for the towels. All the forepart of each aumbrey was cut and carved to give air to the towels. Each aumbrey was provided with a lock or fasten on every door, and every monk had a key for the aumbries, wherein did hang, in every one, clean towels for the monks to dry their hands on, when they washed and went to dinner.

Day after day those patient monks used the quadrangle of the cloister for purposes of study, writing and subdued talk. Here the older monks laboured at the tasks appointed them by obedience, or discussed questions relating to ecclesiastical learning or regular observance, or, at permitted times, joined in recreative conversation. Here too, in parts set aside for the purpose, the younger members toiled at their studies under the eye of their teacher, learnt the monastic observance from the lips of the novice master, or practised the chants and melodies of the Divine Office with the cantor or his assistant.

The floor of the refectory was spread with hay or rushes, which covering was changed three or four times a year. The dining tables were ranged in single rows lengthways, from north to south, with the benches for the monks upon the inside where they sat with their backs to the panelled walls. At the southern end, under a sculptured figure of Our Lord in glory, called “the Majestas,” was the mensa major, daïs, or high table for the Abbot. Above this the scylla, or small signal bell, was suspended. This was sounded by the president of the meal as a sign that the community might begin their refection and for the commencement of the new courses. There was a pulpit on the

west side of the hall, and below it was placed the table for the novices, presided over by their master. At the north-western end of the refectory were the kitchen and offices, a separation being effected by a screen pierced with doors, which veiled the serving hatch, the dresser and the passages to the butteries, cellars, and pantry. The furniture of the kitchen included three caldaria, or cauldrons for boiling water, one for cooking the beans, the second for the vegetables, and a third with an iron tripod, whereon it could stand, so as to furnish hot water for washing plates, dishes and cloths. There were also four great dishes or vessels, one for half-cooked beans, another, and much larger one, into which water was always running, for washing vegetables; a third for washing up plates and dishes; a fourth was reserved for holding a supply of hot water required for the weekly feet washing and for the shaving of faces and tonsures. There were also four spoons reserved for the kitchen; the first for beans, the second for vegetables, the third (a smaller one) for seasoning the soup, and the fourth (an iron one of larger size) for shovelling fuel on the fire. There were always at hand four pairs of sleeves for the use of the servers, so that they might not soil their ordinary habits; two pairs of gloves for moving hot vessels and three napkins for wiping dishes, which were changed every Thursday.

Nor must we omit to mention the beautiful Chapter House, which was of octagonal design. Seats were arranged for the monks in two rows, one raised above the other, and at the easternmost part of the hall was the chair of the Superior with the crucifix above it. In the centre was a raised desk or pulpit for the reader of

Martyrology, at that part of Prime which preceded the daily chapter, and at the evening collation before Compline. The Martyrology contained an account of saints who had died on the day on which the reading took place, also like references to the deceased members of the community at Vale Royal. The dormitories communicated by a covered passage with the south transept of the church for the purpose of giving easy access to the choir for the night offices. Every monk had a little chamber in the dormitory to himself. Each chamber had a window looking towards the Chapter, and the partition between each of the chambers was close wainscotted, and in each window was a desk to support books. Apart from the main building were the infirmary and the guest-house. This latter was presided over by the senior monk, whose duty it was to keep the hall and chambers ready for the reception of the guests, and be ever prepared to receive those who came to ask for hospitality. The Abbot also had special rooms to accommodate distinguished or honoured guests and benefactors of the Abbey. The cellarer's department frequently had to entertain merchants from Chester and elsewhere, and others who came upon the business of the house. A third shelter was provided near the gate (from which we get White Gate) of the monastery for the poorer folk, and a fourth for monks of other religious houses, who had their meals in the common refectory and joined in many of the religious exercises of the community.

The Abbots of Vale Royal were at all times accustomed to provide a most liberal table for strangers. Their benevolence was always free and open. The usual period of stay was two days and nights, and, in ordinary cases,

after dinner on the third day, the guest was expected to take his departure. If for any reason a visitor desired to prolong his stay, permission had to be obtained from the Abbot by the Guestmaster. No payment for hospitality was required, yet it was frequently given.

The Abbey was also provided with two parlours. In one of these the monks could be sent for by the Abbot to discuss necessary matters of business, when strict silence had to be observed in the cloister itself. In the other, visitors could converse with the monks they had come to see. They were, however, warned not to make any long stay and to take care that no sound of their voices disturbed the quiet of the cloister.

Like every other monastery, Vale Royal had an almonry, where the poor could come and beg alms in the name of Christ. The doles of food and clothing were administered by one of the senior monks, who, by his office of almoner, had to interview the crowds of poor who occasionally flocked to the gate in search of relief. His charity was to be wider than his means ; and, where he could not satisfy the actual needs of all, he was at least to manifest his Christian sympathy for their sufferings. In this almonry there was a free school for poor boys.

“ A monastery without a library is like a castle without an armoury.” Vale Royal had an exceptionally fine library, for, when the monks were located at Darnhall, King Henry III. issued letters of recommendation “ to the Abbots, Priors and Convents throughout the Kingdom of England, to furnish the monks there with some books of Divinity.” All and each one was written—each page sacred to manual toil and mental thought—pages of Missal with beautifully illuminated borders full of delicately



Alf Cooke, Ltd., Leeds & London.

Our Lady's Wood.

coloured tracery, with here and there pictures illustrating the life and lessons of Our Lord and the Holy Mother, painted with permanent pigments, exciting our artistic admiration and amazement at the zeal and patience which those monks of old exercised in the quiet cloister and in the study—all, all for love. Some were consecrated with tears of joy—others of pain and regret—all with hope.

The abbey was a centre of light and civilized life and knowledge. It was the saints' seclusion as well as the sinners' sanctuary, and both were intermixed with smiles and sorrows. As the world was, so it is and ever will be. Our own lives are built upon their greatnesses and their weaknesses. Sometimes we despise, in Pharisaic tones, the very foundations of our present-day advantages, yet had we lived then, should we have done any better, or even as well? Is there no opportunity for improvement in the present, as in the past?

“Do *you* wish the world were wiser?
Well, suppose *you* make a start,
By accumulating wisdom
In the scrapbook of *your* heart.
Do not waste *one page* on folly;
Live to learn and learn to live.
If you want to give men knowledge,
You must get it, ere you give.
Do *you* wish the world were happy?
Then remember, day by day,
Just to scatter seeds of kindness
As you pass along the way;
For the pleasures of the many
May be oft-times traced to one,
As the hand that plants an acorn
Shelters armies from the sun.”

—E. W. Wilcox.

Outside the buildings before described, there were the

monastic gardens, divided into separate parts for flowers, fruits, vegetables and herbs for physic purposes. Further away were the park and the abbey lands. Here were opportunities for agricultural pursuits by the seculars of the community. The principal wheat lands were at Darnhall, and that this continued to be so is proved by the letter of the last Abbot to Thomas Cromwell, the Prime Minister of Henry VIII., who demanded the confiscation of such lands, whereupon the following diplomatic reply is sent by the Abbot:—

“So that the substance of the finding of my house in wheate is gotten and had at the maner of Darnall; and without the said maner and demeanes I am not able to furnishe my house accordingly as I have written and advertysed your lordship by my other letters—wherefore, yf it might please your good lordship, that if there be any other ground, that I have in my hande, that might please your good lordship to have, the same shall be at your pleasure during your lyffe, without any rent for the same paying the premeses notwithstanding.”

THE ABBOT.

Of the officials, there was first the Abbot. The first four Abbots resided in temporary edifices, whilst the sumptuous Abbey was being built. Father John, afterwards known as Abbot Peter, was the first to reside in the new Abbey. It was during his term of office, on the Feast of the Assumption (the ascent of the Blessed Virgin, the 15th day of August) in 1330 the monks entered into and took possession of their new residence, although it was not finally completed for twenty years afterwards.

THE PRIOR.

Next in rank to the Abbot was the Prior, or second superior. He had to be honoured by all. When he entered the Chapter, or went to the collation, all rose and continued standing until he had sat down. An ideal Prior is described as "one who is of comely stature and of good personal appearance; a man of handsome face and amiable aspect; always in good temper; of smiling countenance, be it early or late; kind to all, a man calm in his bearing and calm in his demeanour; pleasant in speech, possessing a sweet voice in chanting and impressive in reading; young, brave, of a healthy body and always ready to undergo travail for the need of the Church; skilful in conforming himself to every circumstance of place and time, either with ecclesiastics or laymen; liberal and social, and gentle in reproof; not spiteful, not suspicious, not covetous, not drawling, not slothful; sober, and fluent in the French idiom; a man of moderate capacity, who if too much learning should make mad, might be said to be a perfectly accomplished man." If all this were expected from a Prior, what was expected from the Abbot! The Prior's main duty, besides taking the Abbot's place whenever he was absent, and generally looking after the government of the monastery, was to see to the discipline of the house and to maintain the general excellence of observance.

THE SUB-PRIOR.

The Sub-Prior was the Prior's assistant in the duties of his office. "The Sub-Prior should be remarkable for his holiness," says one English writer; "his charity should be overflowing, his sympathy should be abundant. He must be careful to extirpate evil tendencies, to be unwearied in

his duties, and tender to those in trouble. In a word, he should set before all the example of the Lord."

The other officials were known as obedientaries.

THE CANTOR, OR PRECENTOR.

Of these the most important was the Cantor, or Precentor. He was both singer, librarian and archivist. His place was always on the right hand of the choir; that of his assistant, the succentor or sub-cantor, on the left. On Saturdays, like the rest, he had to wash his feet in the cloister. As librarian, he had to prepare the ink for the various writers of manuscripts and charters, and to procure the necessary parchment for book-making. He had to see that all books were carefully replaced, repaired and renewed. As archivist, it was his duty to enter the names of deceased members of the community and their relatives in the necrology of the House, that they might be remembered on their anniversaries. He was also required to draw up the "Brief" or "Mortuary Roll" wherewith to announce to other monasteries the death of any brother, and to ask for prayers for his soul. The Cantor was also one of the three custodians of the convent seal, and he held one of the three keys of the chest which contained it. When the die, which was in the shape of a single mould, was needed for the purpose of sealing a document, he was responsible for bringing it to the Chapter, with the necessary wax, in order to affix the common seal to the document in the presence of the whole monastery, and for then returning it to its place of safe custody. One of the duties of his assistant, the succentor, was, during the course of the night office, to arouse any drowsy or forgetful brother, by taking his lantern and going towards him to remind him that he

was to be more alert as "a watchman keeping vigil in the Lord's service."

THE SACRIST.

Next in importance to the Cantor, especially in regard to the church services, was the Sacrist. To him, with his several assistants, was committed the care of the church fabric with its sacred plate and vestments, as well as the various reliquaries, shrines and precious ornaments. He had to provide for the cleaning and lighting of the church, and to see that on feast days the altars were decked with the appropriate hangings and ornaments. The High Altar was specially in his own personal care; he was particularly enjoined never to leave it without a frontal of some kind. Every Saturday he had to see that the sconces of the candlesticks were all scoured out, and that the pavements before the altar were washed and cleaned. For the making of the altar bread, the Sacrist and his assistants had to be vested in albs and were required to take every precaution in order to procure spotless cleanliness of hands and person. Once a week also, on Saturdays, the Sacrist was ordered to wash thoroughly all the chalices and sacred vessels used at the Holy Sacrifice and to see that no stains of wine, or marks of use, were left on them. Another function of the Sacrist was the care of the cemetery where the dead brethren were laid to their last rest. He was to keep it neat and tidy, with the grass cut and trimmed and the walks free from weeds. No animals were ever allowed to feed among the graves or to disturb the peace of "God's Acre." He had to purchase the supply of wax for making the best candles, and the tallow or mutton fat for the cressets and the common sort of lights, together with cotton for making the wicks. To light up the dormitory

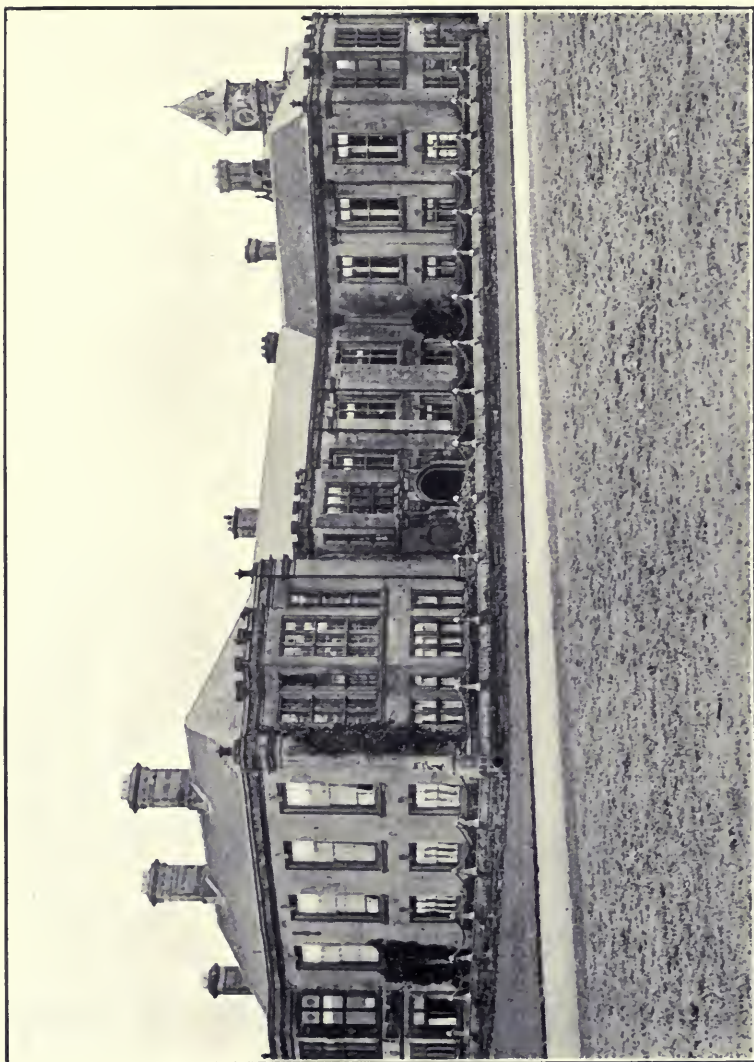
and church cloister, the Sacrist had to rise before the others were called for Mattins, so that all might be in readiness for the beginning of the service. At Mattins, he himself was always to have a lighted lantern ready in case of any difficulty, and at the verse of the Te Deum "The heavens and the earth are full of Thy glory" he took this lantern, and going to the priest whose duty it was to read the Gospel, bowed, and gave it to him so that he might hold it to throw its light on the sacred text. In winter, after the collation, the Sacrist waited in the Chapter room after the community, standing aside and bowing as they passed out. When all had departed, he extinguished the lights and locked the door. Amongst many minor duties, one was slightly associated with the neighbouring salt town of Northwich. Each Sunday, the Sacrist had to obtain from the Cellarer the platter of salt to be blessed for the holy water. Salt was mixed or mingled with the holy water to make it wholesome and pure, in allusion to II. Kings ii. 19, 20, 21 and 22, which are as follows:—"And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold I pray thee the situation of this city is pleasant, as my Lord seeth; but the water is naught, and the ground barren. And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought it to him. And he went forth unto the springs of water and cast the salt in there and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters, there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land. So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha, which he spake." After the Sunday blessing of the salt, the Sacrist was himself to place a pinch of the blessed salt in every salt cellar used in the refectory. Several times a year it was the general duty of the under

officials of the sacristy to sweep the church, and to remove the hay with which it was mostly carpeted and to put fresh hay in its place. Once a year, also, they had to find new rush mats for the choir, the altars and the steps of the choir, to place under the feet of the monks in their stalls.

THE CELLARER.

Who has not heard of Simon the Cellarer? This functionary was the monastic purveyor of all foodstuffs for the monastic community. He was not confined simply to the supply of convent ale or to duties in the cellar, as is implied by the jovial song of modern days. In fact, the official described in the song existed only in the fertile imagination of the writer. The real official had to see that the corn came in from the Abbey granges, and flour from the Bradford and Darnhall mills, and that it was ready for use by the bakers; that what was needed of flesh, fish and vegetables for immediate use was ready at hand. He had to provide all that was necessary for the kitchen, but was not to make any great purchases without the knowledge and consent of the Abbot. He necessarily had to be away at the different granges, where the wheat sheaves given in kind, for tithes, were always stored, to see that his overseer was effectually discharging his duties, and also to attend the neighbouring fairs and markets. As the "Martha" of the establishment, always busy with many things in the service of the brethren, he was exempt from much of the ordinary choir duty, but when not present at the public office, he had to say his own privately in a side chapel. He had the charge of all the servants, and he alone could engage, dismiss or punish them for disobedience. At dinner, the Cellarer stood by the kitchen hatch to see the

dishes as they came in, and that the serving was properly done. Some of his duties were prescribed with singular minuteness, as, for instance, he was to collect the spoons after dinner, and in so doing, he was to carry the Abbot's in his right hand and the rest in his left. Possibly the Abbot's was a silver spoon and the others pewter. He was also to take care that no one sat down before the Abbot or the Prior. In addition he had to see to the provision of fuel, the carriage of goods, the general repairs of the Abbey, and the purchase of all materials, such as wood, iron, glass, nails, etc. He was told to avoid ever getting into the habit of trafficking like a tradesman, of striving too eagerly after some slender profit, or of grinding out a hard bargain from those who could ill afford it. The Sub-Cellarer was told to be kind, and to possess polished manners. He kept the keys of the cellar and drew the necessary quantity of ale before each meal. What if he did take a little extra for himself! He was not an angel, nor was he a thief, and the ale was not strong, as hops were not then grown. When the barrels were filled with new ale, they were to be constantly watched by the Sub-Cellarer for fear of an accident!!! In winter, he was to see that straw or hay bands were placed around the vats to protect them from frost, and that, if need be, fires were lighted. In summer, he was to have the windows closed with shutters, to keep the cellar cool. He was not to serve any ale till at least the fourth day after it had been made—and, shall we add, before it had been properly tested and tasted!!! He had to watch to see that the flour was of the proper quality, and on feast days he was supposed to give a better kind of bread and a different shape of loaf. It was the Sub-Cellarer's place to entertain any tenants of



Dale Royal in 1911.

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the monastic farms, who might come on business, or for any other reason, to the monastery, and from him any of the monks could obtain what was necessary to entertain their relatives or friends when they visited them, or the small tokens of affectionate remembrance which they were permitted to send them four times a year.

THE REFECTORIAN.

Another officer at Vale Royal was the Refectorian, who had charge of the refectory or dining-room. Out of the revenues attached to his office he had to find all tables and benches necessary, and to keep them in repair, to purchase what cloths and napkins, jugs, dishes and mats might be required. Three times a year he received from the monastic farms, mostly at Darnhall, five loads of straw to place under the feet of the brethren when they were sitting at table, and the same quantity of hay to spread over the floor of the refectory. Five times a year he had to renew the rushes which were spread about the hall, and on Holy Saturday, by custom, he was supposed to scatter bay leaves, to scent the air, and to give a festal spring-like appearance to the place. In the summer, he might throw flowers about, with mint and fennel to purify the air, and provide fans for changing and cooling it. His other duties included the care of the lavatory. He had to provide water—hot if necessary—for washing purposes, and always to have a clean towel hanging for general use, as well as two others ready in the refectory. All towels of any kind were to be changed twice a week, on Sundays and Thursdays. He had to keep in the lavatory a supply of sand, and a whetstone for the brethren to use in scouring and sharpening their knives. On Maundy Thursday, the

tables were to be set with clean white cloths, and a caritas, or extra glass of wine, was given to all the community. One candlestick was provided for every three monks at the evening meal, from November the first to the Purification, February the second.

THE KITCHENER.

Next after the Refectorian came the Kitchener. He was to be almost "a paragon of virtue." He ought to be "a truly religious man, just, upright, gentle, patient and trustworthy; always ready to return a mild answer to those who came to him." He was "not to be too lavish, nor too niggardly, but ever to keep the happy mean in satisfying the needs of the brethren, and in his gifts of food and other things to such as made application to him." He had to keep a strict account of what was expended in provisions, and of what amounts were served out to the brethren. Each week he had to sum up the totals and at the end of the month he had to present his accounts for examination to the Abbot, being prepared to explain why the cost of one week was greater than that of another. He was to see that the cooks got the food ready in time, so that the brethren might never be kept waiting. In a special manner he was to see to the sick, and serve them with food that they might fancy or relish, or that was good for them. He had to attend daily in the larder to receive and check the food. When the eggs were brought by the "vitellers" he had to note who brought them, and whence they came, and to see how they were to be used. He was to see that the paid "larderer" had meat and fish, salt and fresh, and that the fowls and other birds were fed whilst they were under his charge, waiting for the time they should be wanted for the table. After having made



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A view in Our Lady's Wood
at Vale Royal.

his daily inspection of the outer larder, the Kitchener was to visit the inner larder, in order to see that all the plates and dishes were properly scoured, that all the food, ready for cooking, was kept sweet and clean, and that all the fish from the Dee, the Weaver, Oakmere, Petty Pool and elsewhere were covered with damp reeds to keep them fresh. He was warned "prudently not to put much trust in the cooks and the servants, and, on account of the danger and temptation," not to let them have his keys without going personally to see what they wanted them for. Amongst the Kitchener's chief, though constantly changing, assistants were the weekly Servers. They entered upon their weekly duties on the Sundays after the service called Lauds, when those who were finishing their week and those who were beginning had to ask and receive the triple blessing. Immediately after receiving the benediction, the new officers went to their weekly work. They drew water to wash with, and, after their ablutions, went to the kitchen to do whatever might be needful. On Saturdays they had to prepare hot and cold water with towels in the cloister for the weekly mandatum or feet-washing. The first Server washed the feet of the brethren, beginning with those of the Abbot, and the second wiped them with the towels he had already dried and warmed.

THE INFIRMARIAN.

Another important and necessary officer was the Infirmarian. "He must be gentle and good tempered, kind, compassionate to the sick, and willing, as far as possible, to gratify their needs with affectionate sympathy." When one of the brethren was seized with any sickness and came to the infirmary, it was the Infirmarian's duty to bring thither the sick man's plate, his spoon and his bed, and to

inform the Cellarer and Kitchener, so that the sick man's portion might be assigned to him in the infirmary refectory. This officer always slept in the infirmary, even when there were no sick actually there, because he had always to be ready for any emergency. He was advised always to keep in his cupboard a good supply of ginger, cinnamon, peony, etc., so as to be able, at once, to administer some soothing mixture or cordial when it was required, and to remember how much depended in sickness on some such slight act of sympathy and kindness. The law of silence was hardly relaxed at all in the infirmary. The sick man could indeed talk about himself and his ailments and necessities to the Infirmarian at any time, and the latter could give him every consolation and advice, but there was apparently no permission for general conversation, even among the sick, except at regular times for recreation. Even at meal times the infirm ate in silence and followed, as far as might be, the rules of the monastic refectory. Some monks there were, occasionally, who were ailing merely from the effects of the very monotony and the irksome character of the life in the cloister, from the continued strain of silence, from the sheer fatigue of choral duties, or from sleeplessness; they simply required rest, not medicine, or gentle exercise in the open air. Those who had grown old in the monastic service were to find a place of rest in the infirmary, where they were to be honoured by all. They, too, had to keep the rule and had to remember "that even the Pope could not grant them a dispensation contrary to their vows." So even they had to keep silence, if possible, especially the great night silence after Compline. The curious practice of periodical blood-letting formed part of the ordinary Infirmarian's

work. It was rendered necessary because of the coarse and heating fare of the monks. The operation was performed, or might be performed, on all, four times a year, if possible, in February, April, September, and near the feast of St. John the Baptist (Midsummer Day). It was not to take place in the time of harvest, in Advent or Lent, or on the three days following the feasts of Christmas, Easter or Pentecost. The community were operated upon in batches of from two to six at a time, and a special day was arranged for them by the Prior in Chapter, who would announce at the proper time that, "those who are sitting near such and such a picture" or "those who sat at this or that table" were to be bled. In settling the turns, consideration had, of course, to be paid to the needs of the community. From first to last the operation of blood-letting occupied four days, and the process was simple. At the time appointed the Infirmarian had a fire lighted in the calefactory, if it were needed, and thither, between Tierce and Sext, if the day was not a fast, or between Sext and None if it were, the operator and his victims repaired. If the latter desired to fortify themselves against the lancet, they might proceed beforehand to the refectory and take something to eat and drink. During the time of healing, after the styptic had been applied and the bandage fastened, the discipline of the cloister was somewhat mitigated. The patient, for instance, could always spend the hours of work and reading, in repose, either lying on his bed or sitting in the chapter room or cloister, as he felt disposed. Till his return to full choir work he was not bound to any duty. If he liked to go to the Hours in choir he was to sit. He was never to bend down or do penance of any kind, for fear of displacing the

bandages, and he was to go out of church before the others, for fear of having his arm rubbed if he were to walk in the ranks. In the refectory the monk who had been "blooded" received the same food as the rest, with the addition of a half-pound of white bread and an extra portion, if possible, of eggs. Those who found it necessary to be cupped or scarified more frequently than during the prescribed months had to get leave, but to prevent human nature playing tricks with the Abbot the rules prescribed that they were not to stay away from regular duties on that account.

THE ALMONER.

No monastic institution would be complete in its organization without the conventional Almoner, and Vale Royal, especially during the Abbotship of Peter (Father John), aimed at efficiency. The Almoner's chief duties were to distribute the alms of the monastery to the poor. One writer says: "Every Almoner must have his heart aglow with charity. His pity should know no bounds, and he should possess the love of others in a most marked degree. He must show himself as the helper of orphans, the father of the needy, and as one who is ever ready to cheer the lot of the poor and help them to bear their hard life." He must not waste the substance of the monastery; he had often to visit the aged poor and those who were blind and bed-ridden. He was to assist privately those who, having been rich, had been brought to poverty, and accordingly their feeling had to be respected by not requiring them to sit in the almonry with the other poor. He was told to submit, without manifesting any sign of impatience, to the loud-voiced importunity of beggars, and on no account must he upbraid them, "remembering



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Excavations at Dale Royal, with general view of Ann's Grave.

always that they are made to the image of God, and redeemed by the blood of Christ."

When engaged with Christ's poor in the almonry, in ministering to the wants of the body, he should never forget those of the soul, and, as a priest, when opportunity served, should speak to them about spiritual matters. He had charge of all the old clothes of the religious, and could distribute them as he thought fit.

To the Almoner belonged the remnants of the meals in the refectory, the Abbot's apartments, the guest house and the infirmary. At the close of every meal, one of the weekly servers took round a basket to collect the portions of bread, &c., which the monks had not consumed, and after the dinner, the Almoner could himself claim, as left for him, anything that was not guarded by being covered with a napkin. Upon the death of any member of the establishment, a cross was put in the refectory, upon the table, in front of the place where the dead monk had been accustomed to sit, and for thirty days the full meal was served and afterwards given to the poor, that they might pray for the departed brother.

The Almoner also superintended the daily Maundy or washing the feet of three of the poor selected for that purpose. On the great Maundy, the Thursday before Easter, it was his duty to select a number of deserving poor, to be entertained, equal to the number of the community—and after they had had their meal, the Almoner furnished each religious monk with a penny to bestow upon the poor man he had served. Maundy Thursday (the day before Good Friday) is celebrated to this day by the distribution at Westminster Abbey of Maundy pence to as many old men and old women as correspond with the age

of the King or reigning monarch then alive. As an ordinary part of his office, the Almoner had also a good deal to do with the monastic school, other than the claustral school for young religious, which was connected with the monastery. There, young clerks were to have free quarters in the almonry, and the Almoner was frequently to see them set to argue one against the other, to sharpen their wits. He was to keep them strictly "well under the rod," and he had to find, out of the revenues of his office, all "discipline rods," both for the boys and for use in the monastic chapter. If they did not learn, and especially if they would not, the Almoner was to get rid of them, and fill their places with those who would.

To the Almoner, at least partially, belonged the duty of attending to the mortuary rolls or notices of death. In this capacity he had to supervise the "breviators," or letter carriers, who were sent to the other abbeys or to the friends of the deceased to announce the death of the brethren, or who came with such rolls. He received the rolls and gave them into the hands of the Cantor to copy and to notify the community.

At the time of the long processions, also on Rogation Days, two of the almonry servants, standing at the church door, were wont to distribute box-wood walking sticks to such of the community who, through age or infirmity, needed them to walk with.

The Almoner was expected to keep a supply of socks, linen and woollen cloth, and other necessities of life, so that if, by chance, Christ Himself were at any time to appear in the guise of a poor, naked, or hungry man, "He might not have to depart from His own House unfed, or without some clothes to cover the rags of His poverty."

THE GUESTMASTER.

The Guestmaster at Vale Royal was authorised to extend hospitality to travellers, whom business, pleasure or necessity compelled to journey on "the King's Highway." Scribbled on the margin of the monastic chartulary as a piece of advice specially applicable to this officer, sometimes designated the Hospitarius, were the following lines :—

"Si sapiens fore vis, sex serva quae tibi mando
Quid dicas, et ubi, de quo, cui, quomodo, quando."

which may be translated thus :—

"If thou would'st be wise, observe six things I command you.
Before speaking, think *what* you say and *where* you say it;
about and *to* whom you talk, as well as *how* and *when* you are
conversing."

One can understand this excellent rule, when the officer had to entertain complete strangers, some of whom, possibly, might not be making a friendly visit. The Guestmaster's first office was to see that the guest-house was always ready for the arrival of any visitor. He was to make certain that there was a supply of straw sufficient for the beds; that the basins and jugs were clean, inside and out, that the floors were well swept and spread with rushes, that the furniture was properly dusted, and that the whole house was kept free from cobwebs and from every speck of dirt. The whole principle of religious hospitality was summed up in the words of St. Benedict's rule :—
S/ "Hospites tamquam Christus suscipiantur." ("Guests are to be received as if they were Christ Himself.") Directly the Guestmaster had cordially received the newcomer at the monastery gate, he was to conduct him to the church. There he sprinkled him with holy water, and knelt by him whilst he offered up a short prayer of salutation to God,

into whose house he had come safely after the perils of a journey. After this the Master conducted his guest to the common parlour, and here, if he were a stranger, he begged to know his name, position and country, sending to acquaint the Abbot if the guest was one who, in his opinion, ought to receive attention from the head of the house. When the guest was going to stay beyond a few hours, he was taken, after the first and formal reception, to the guest-house, where, when he had been made comfortable, the Master arranged for the reading of some passages from the Scriptures or some spiritual work. If the strangers were monks from some other monastery, and the length of their visit afforded sufficient time, he showed them over the church and house, and if they had servants and horses, he sent to acquaint the Cellarer, that they too might receive all needful care. Every visitor who was an Abbot was to be treated in all things by the monks like their own Abbot. For each monk guest, the Master got from the Sacrist four candles, and the Chamberlain found the tallow for the cressets in the guest-house. When the guest desired to say the Office, books and a light were to be provided in the guest-hall and the Master was to recite it with him, if he so desired. If, on great feasts, guests desired to be present in the church for Mattins, the Master called them in ample time, waited for them whilst they rose, and then with a lighted lantern accompanied them to the choir. There he was to find them a place, and a book, and leave them a light to read by. Before Lauds, he came to them with a lantern to take them back to their chambers that they might again retire to bed till the morning office.

At all times when guests were leaving, the Master was



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A view in Our Lady's Wood
at Vale Royal.

bound to be present, and before wishing them God-speed on their journey, he was instructed to go round their chambers, "in order to see that nothing was left behind, such as a sword or a knife; and nothing was taken off by mistake, which belonged to his charge by his office, and for which he was responsible."

THE CHAMBERLAIN.

There was at Vale Royal, an official styled the Camerarius, or Chamberlain. His duties were concerned with the wardrobe of the brethren. For this purpose he was provided with an official list of what was lawful or required, and from time to time, with his servant, he had to examine the clothing of the monks, removing what was past repair and substituting new garments for the old, which were placed in the poor-cupboard to satisfy the charitable intentions of the Almoner. In the distribution of these cast-off clothes, those who worked for the monastery had the first claim, if they were in need.

Three sets of shirts, drawers and socks, were an ordinary allowance for priests and deacons and two sets for others; with two tunics, scapulars and hoods and two pairs of boots. These last were over and beside the "night boots," which were apparently made of thick cloth, with soles of noiseless material similar to our modern felt.

All underclothing was to be washed according to rule, once a fortnight in summer, and once, say, every three weeks in winter. Any monk who wished a garment repaired had to place it, in the morning, in one of the bags in the cloister leading to the chapter house. Thither, each day, came the assistant Chamberlain, to see what had been placed there, and what was wanted. He then carried what he found to the tailor's shop, and fetched it again

when the repairs had been executed. In the tailor's department there were four lay officials and five helpers. The first had charge of the skins and furs; the second was the master tailor; the third the master cutter; and the fourth called the "proctor of the shop." The Camerarius had to provide all necessary material, and for that purpose had to attend neighbouring fairs and the vendors of cloth who came to the monastery.

At that time, although Vale Royal had, according to the Foundation Charter, a house where glass was made for the stained windows of the church, windows in other parts of the Abbey were often unglazed or badly glazed, or covered with some coarse oiled material, and the cold winters of Cheshire required the general use of skins and furs as lining to the ordinary winter garments for protection from the weather and draughts. The cloister was no exception, especially when the monks had to spend some hours each night in the great unwarmed church. The Camerarius therefore knew that during the summer he had to prepare a store of lambskins and catskins before the cold set in, and he also obtained a special supply of salt from Northwich or Middlewich, for the purpose of curing the skins.

The Chamberlain was also charged to keep an eye upon the lavatory, and when it was frozen in the winter, he was told to see that there were hot water and warm dry towels for the monks' use. He had also to keep by him a store of sweet hay, to spread round the bathing tubs for the monks to stand upon. The arrangements for shaving had also to be made by the Chamberlain. The brother who undertook the office of barber, kept his implements—razors, strop, soap and brushes, etc., in a small movable chest which

usually stood near the dormitory door. When necessary he carried it down to the cloister, where, at any time that the community were at work, or sitting in the cloister, he could sharpen up his razors or prepare his soaps. When the time of the general "rasura" came, the community sat silently in two lines, one set along the cloister wall, the other facing them with their backs to the windows. The general shaving was made a religious act, like almost every other incident of cloister life, by the recitation of psalms. The brothers who shaved the others, and those who carried the dishes and razors, were directed to say the Benedicite together, before beginning their work. All the rest, as they sat there during the ceremony—except, of course, the individual being operated upon—said the "Verba mea" and other psalms. The sick, and those who had leave, were shaved apart from the rest in the warmer calefactory. The usual interval between the times of shaving the monks' tonsures was about three weeks, but there was always a special shaving upon the eve of all great festivals.

THE MASTER OF THE NOVICES.

The monk holding the above appointment was one of the most important officials at Vale Royal. St. Benedict's description of an ideal Novice Master was: "a person fitted for winning souls." During the year of his probation, the novice was in complete subjection to his master. The postulant who also came to beg for admission into religion usually remained in the guest-house for four days. After that time he came to the morning Chapter for three consecutive days, and kneeling in the midst of the brethren, urged his petition to be allowed to join their ranks, and to enter into holy religion in the monastery.

After the third morning, if his request was granted, he was clothed in the habit of a monk and was handed over to the care of the Novice Master, who was to train him, and to teach him the practices of the religious life ; to test him and to prove him ; and who for a whole year was to be his guide, his master and his friend. As was previously stated, the eastern side of the cloister at Vale Royal was assigned to the use of the novices. The first lesson given to the novice was how to arrange his habit and cowl ; and how to walk with that modesty and gravity which became a religious man. The neophyte was next shown how he should bow and when the various kinds of bows were to be made. If the bow was to be profound, it was pointed out to him how he could tell practically when it was correctly made, by allowing his crossed arms to touch his knees. He was further taught the necessity and meaning of such regulations as the custody of the eyes, silence, and respect for superiors. Step by step, he was drilled into the exercises of the regular life and taught to understand that they were not mere outward formalities, but were, or ought to be, signs of the inward change of soul indicated by the monk's cowl. The cloister was the monk's school-room. His Master assigned to him a definite place among his fellows, and, after the morning office, he sat there in silence with the book given him, out of which to learn some one of the many things a novice had to acquire during the year of probation. The rules of the Order ; the prayers and psalms he had to learn by heart ; the correct method of singing, chanting and reading ; the rudiments of the Latin language—hard work enough it was to get through it all in twelve fleeting months. Thrice during the year of probation, if the novice still

desired to join the community, his Master brought him to the Chapter, where, on his knees, he renewed his petition to be received as one of the brethren. At length, as the end of the year approached, a more solemn demand was made, and the novice, having been dismissed from the Chapter, the Master gave his opinion and the verdict of the monks was taken. If the vote were favourable to the petitioner a day was appointed for him to make his vows, and, having pronounced these with great solemnity, he received the kiss of peace from all, as a token of his reception into the full charity of the brotherhood.

THE WEEKLY OFFICIALS.

Reference has been made before to the officials whose duties merely lasted a week. The first of these was known as the Hebdomadarian, or the priest for the week. He began his labours with the Vespers on Saturday, and continued them until the same time in the following week. It was his chief duty to commence all the various canonical hours during his week of office. He gave all the blessings that might be required; he blessed the holy water and, on the proper days, the candles and ashes. It was his office to sing the High Mass on all days during the week.

A second weekly official was the Antiphoner, whose duty it was to read the Invitatory at Mattins. He gave out or intoned the first Antiphon at the Psalms, the Versicles, the Responsorias after the lessons, and the *Benedicamus Domino* at the conclusion of each hour.

Among other weekly officials should be mentioned the Servers and the Reader at meals. These brethren could take something to eat and drink before the community came to the refectory, in order the better to do their duty.

The Reader was charged, very strictly, always to prepare what he had to read beforehand and to find the places, so as to avoid all likelihood of mistakes. He was to take the directions of the Cantor as to pronunciation, pitch of the voice, and the rate at which he was to read in public. The Servers began their duty by asking a blessing in church on Sunday morning. With the Reader and other officials who could not be present at the monastic meals, they took theirs afterwards in the refectory.

THE ABBEY PORTER.

The Abbey Porter must not be overlooked. This office was for the most part committed to men of mature age and unblameable life. He only entered the kitchen, refectory, infirmary and residence of the Superior, to deliver a message when visitors came. He always slept at the Abbey gate and had a horse, so that as often as the Superior or Cellarer wished, he might attend their summons and ride with them. He was allowed the service of a boy, who took the key, after curfew, to the Cellarer's bed, and fetched it again in the morning.



CHAPTER XXII.

THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE ABBEY.

"It is a very good world to live in,
To lend, or to spend, or to give in;
But to beg, or to borrow, or to get a man's own,
It's the very worst world that ever was known."

WE have traversed the greater part of the interior of this huge building, consecrated, as it was, to the service of God according to the ideas and thoughts of the men and women living in that period of our history. One can hear a sort of modern coarse laugh, a religious jeer or sneer; eyes are upturned—not to Heaven—for Heaven does not want to look at the whites, but at the pictures which the retina has permanently painted on each of the thousand little cells of the brain. The Pharisee lived a thousand years before a stone of the Abbey was laid—and still lives.

"The evil that men do lives after them,
The good is oft interred with their bones."

So Shakespeare wrote some three centuries after the doors of Vale Royal were first opened, and those memorable lines of his were spoken of a noble senator who had been foully murdered fifteen hundred years before they were penned.

And so it is with the monks and their monasteries. Generally speaking, all that the modern genius knows is that a capricious king, who married six wives, dissolved—polite history says—suppressed all these monasteries

because they were associated with a religion he flung from him like his overcoat, for the simple reason that the Head of that religion, the Pope, most righteously refused him a divorce from a high-minded queen, so that he might marry a less virtuous woman.

True, there were some excesses charged against the monasteries, but few were proved. The Commissioners appointed to report were prejudiced and partial. It is equally true that King Henry VIII. wanted money to indulge in his own excesses, and so, with Parliamentary sanction—a Parliament which was afraid of the King—he invented a new form of treason. The monks were to turn their coats because he had turned his. He was to be supreme Head of the Church in place of the Pontiff, when, only a few months before he would have hanged those who refused to acknowledge the Pope as such supreme head. He practically said “I have turned over, you must do the same,” or be tried for treason. He obtained access to the monks’ moneys and treasures, razed to the ground their beautiful buildings, stripped them and their owners, pocketed the spoil for his own exchequer, and himself exceeded the excesses of those whom he had exceeded. The blood of abbots and monks flowed from Tyburn as freely as from a butcher’s shambles, so fast and so thick that the light of a splendid history and a Christian zeal is obscured with the dirty daub. Lies were invented—not patented, for the patent would not have held water—which secured the death of these religious men and the destruction of their buildings, full of Christian life and zeal, preserving for us to-day through the dark ages of the world the scriptural and Biblical knowledge we possess.

That Vale Royal continued to do good work is proved by



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Top portion of the mullion of a large window, possibly the West Window, of the Abbey Church, showing the tracery branching off from four arms.

the fact that as no charge was made or could then be proved against the Abbot and the inmates by King Henry's Commission, it was sought to show that the Abbot voluntarily agreed to surrender the Abbey and the Abbey lands. Listen to part (the only part preserved) of the letter written by John Harwood, the last Abbot, addressed to "Sir Thomas Cromewell, Knyght, Lord Cromewell, Lord prevye seall and chieff secretarye to the Kynge's highness," then also holding the high office of Seneschal of Vale Royal:—

"THE ABBOT OF VALE ROYAL TO CROMWELL.

(*From MS. Har. 604, fol. 62.*)

"Mr. Holcroft has shown to me and my brethren the kynges most graciouse and drade commyssion, wherein his graciouse plesure was that for the gratuytye that his grace trusted in me and my brethren, that we wold clerelye of our own consentes surrendre into his graciouse handes our monasterye, beyng of his most graciouse foundation, and wherof your lordship is stuard. My good lorde, the truthe is, I nor my said brethren have never consented to surrendre our monasterye, nor yett doo, nor never will doo by our good willes, onles it shall please the kynges grace to giff to us commandement so to doo, which I can not perceve in the Commyssion of maister Holcroft so to bee. And if any informacyon be giffon unto his magestye, or unto your good lordship, that we shulde consent to surrendre, as is above said, I assure your good lordship, upon my fidelitie and truthe, ther was nevr non such consent made by me nor my brethren, nor no person nor persons had auctoritye so to do in our names. Wherefore I humbly beseche your good lordship, in whome is my single trust under God and the kynges magestye, to be meane for us

unto his grace, so that we may contynewe in our sayd monasterye to pray for his most noble grace and your good lordship, which we shall dayly doo, accordyng to our bounden dvyties, during our lyves. I assure your lordship I am cumyng upwardes as fast as my seknes will suffre me, to beseche your lordship of charite to be good to our pouer monasterye. I send unto your lordship the bill indented made by me and my brethren, whiche in presence of worshipfull men I proffered to M. Holcroft, whiche to take he refused. And thus our Lord God preserve your lordship in good helthe. Writen at Lychefyld, the IX day of Septembre, by your pouer bedeman,

“JOHN, abbot of Valerayall.

“To the ryght honorable sir Thomas
Cromewell, knyght, lord Cromewell,
lord prevye seall, and chieff
secretayre to the kynges highenes.”

John Harwood's mission failed, as it was bound to do. A capital indictment for treason was preferred, a packed jury, presided over by Cromwell himself, the chief conspirator, found him guilty, and his name disappears from history.

We have now had the beginning and the end—the Alpha and the Omega—of the monastery whose work we are further to picture and describe.

This partial history helps one to understand how some of its inmates lived and died. If there be anyone to scorn the work, let him think : he should know, first, the condition of Cheshire outside the Abbey gates in that fourteenth century when Father John was asked to become Abbot. Comparatively few could read with ease ; there was scarcely any literature. A few poems, a rare chronicle, the written

Bible, the Missal, the Breviary and "Hours" made up the bulk of the manuscripts of that dark age. Few of the mighty castles of the Norman Conquerors (Chester and Beeston were two of them) boasted of a library which held any books besides these works, and even these were little used save by the monk or chaplain who served the Castle and its baron as almoner. That Cheshire was no worse than other places is proved by the fact that in that same century Du Guesclin, Constable of France, one of the foremost men of the age, could neither read nor write. John, King of Bohemia, was equally ignorant. The Emperor Frederick Barbarossa (end of twelfth century) could not read. Phillippe le Hardi, King of France (thirteenth century), was likewise unable to read. For many centuries it was rare for any layman, of whatever rank, to know how to sign his name. Only half a century before King Edward the First laid the first stone of the Abbey had Magna Charta been granted—sealed with the King's seal—but without any signature, wrung from him to ensure the rights of the people, at the instance of a Cistercian monk, Stephen Langton, then Archbishop of Canterbury. The moral condition of England at that time is described by King John's contemporaries, who wrote:—"Foul as it is, hell itself is defiled by the fouler presence of John." Less than a score of years before that stone-laying, King Henry III. had issued his first proclamation to his people in the English language, prior to which it had been Norman French with a mixture of Anglo-Saxon. Chaucer, the great English poet, was not born until Father John had reigned at Vale Royal for over ten years, and even his English cannot be understood to-day without a glossary. A century had to

elapse before William Caxton produced the first printed book under the shadow of the Benedictine Monastery whose church of St. Peter is now known as Westminster Abbey. Oxford—then called Oxenford—had no long fronts of venerable colleges, or stately walks beneath immemorial elms, but instead were mean and filthy lanes. Thousands of boys huddled in bare lodging-houses, clustering round teachers as poor as themselves, in church porch and house porch, drinking, quarrelling, dicing, begging at the corners of the streets. At night, roysterer and reveller roamed with torches through the narrow lanes, defying bailiffs and cutting down the burghers at their doors.

Potatoes—our staple food of to-day—were then unknown in England. Fancy Ireland without potatoes for two hundred years after the Abbey was opened—and then to come to us through a Spanish monk! No tea either, until about the same date as the welcome potato, and then priced at fifty shillings per lb. The same with coffee. Perhaps we can now understand why the Monastery brewed and occasionally gave away “Convent ale.” No
 + ~~beer or ale~~ was then ~~made from~~ hops, which at that time were unknown in this country. Con-
tain

“Turkey, carp, hops, piccadell and beer
 Came into England all in one year.”

So the Convent ale was more probably flavoured with horehound, nettles, and other herbs—it was not the “heady,” sticky, sugary stuff of to-day. Certainly it could then be brewed by anyone without licence or tax. Hydromel—a liquor consisting of honey diluted with water—was also drunk. Before fermentation it was called simple hydromel; after fermentation it was known as vinous hydromel or mead. It was also known by the

name of metheglin, and as such was enriched with spices. Modern civilization prevents its sale except by licence. There was then, however, another grievance—one had to drink, even Convent ale, without a smoke, for there was no tobacco! To have seen a man pouring out volumes of smoke and producing fire with his breath would have frightened the natives, like the Devil did occasionally by personal visits. To make up for the loss of all the above articles, thimblefuls of cordials were poured out in well appointed houses, but only on special occasions. Gin, rum, and whisky were unknown. What a delightful world for total abstainers! Sometimes there were presents of “white bread,” meaning bread made from wheaten flour. For the poor man’s loaf, then, was dark as mud and as tough as his shoe leather. So was he!!!

If Father John thought of the responsibilities of the internal management of Vale Royal Abbey, with its religious monks, had he not also to think of the external control of a larger number of secular or lay monks, termed conversi, largely engaged in agricultural pursuits on the monastic lands, and also of the large number of tenants and villeins and their families. These conversi, or lay monks, were the great distinguishing feature between the Cistercians and the unreformed Benedictines. The Abbey estates were large, and comprised not only Vale Royal and its inner and outer parks, but the manors of Darnhall, Over, and Weaverham, also the manor of Conewardsley (probably close to the present Tower Lodge of the New Park), Gayton in Wirral; land at Mooresbarrow, Nether (Little) Over, Bradford, Sutton, Lostock Gralam, Twemlow and Stanthorne; the moor and pond of Oakmere; one salt pit at Middlewich; houses and land in the city of Chester

—eighteen shops called cobblers' shops in Bridge Street of the same city, as well as land in East Street ; one salt pit in the town of Northwich ; a house at Kingsley ; an oxgang of land at Rudheath ; rights of pasture and wood to burn in all the King's forests in the county ; a stone quarry ; a building within the Abbey grounds for the making of glass ; the churches of Kirkham, Frodsham, Weaverham and the Castle of Peak ; with forfeiture to the Abbot and monks of the goods of tenants who shall commit offences involving loss of life or limb ; with power in the different Manors to exact Soc and Sac, toll and team, infangenthef, utfangenthef, wisgilthef, hamsocwayf, grythebruche, blodewyte, fightwyte, ferdewyte, flemenswyte, murder, theft, forstal, ordelf, orest, and the amends of bread and ale, and amerciaments of their men wheresoever and howsoever.

Poor John !

Yet, by way of relief, the Abbot and the monks were to be free from all scot and geld, and all aids of Kings, sheriffs, and all their ministers, and of hidage, carnage, danegelt, hornegelt ; and of escuage, tallage, lestage, stallage, shires, hundreds, wapentachs, pleas, suits, wards, wardpaym, haver-penny, hundred-penny, scot-penny, boredhall-penny, bottle-penny, tinig-penny, and of works of castles, parks, bridges and enclosures ; and of all carriage, murage, summage, shipping ; and from building Kings' houses and from all manner of work.

Happy John !

Yet roads had to be made, bridges built, marshy swamps drained, land tilled, sheep and cattle purchased and fed, wool cut and converted into cloth ; garments, hoods, cowls, scapulars, and underclothing made and provided ; laws

administered ; order maintained, and peace and rest secured. Innumerable journeys on horseback were required to Chester and other places, occasionally to London and elsewhere to interview the King and his officials. No railways, stage coaches, post, telegraphs or telephones. Precious little writing paper, inferior ink, and very few penmen.

Notwithstanding all this, the rules of St. Benedict were to be strictly observed—Mattins and Lauds—Prime, Terce and Sext, Vespers and Compline daily, and Masses between whiles.

And all in good temper !



CHAPTER XXIII.

FATHER JOHN AND ABBOT PETER.

“Born for success, he seemed
With grace to win, with heart to hold,
With shining gifts that took all eyes.”

—*Emerson.*

AFTER his interview with Ida in St. Mary's Nunnery, Father John rode back alone from Chester to Norton Priory, calling on his way at Halton Castle. Numerous inquiries were made as to what had happened, and when Sir Peter and Captain Delamere, with his horsemen, would return; what had become of Ida and Sir Barnaby de Gresford: were they married? To this John gave an emphatic and decisive “No, and never will be.” When he arrived at the Priory, the porter took his horse from him, and he hastened to see the Prior, who received him in his own parlour.

“Aye, now well, John, by the Blessed Virgin and St. Christopher,” said the Prior, “where have you been, and what have you been doing, and what's the finish of it all?”

“My Lord Prior,” answered John, “all be well, for which I humbly thank God, and this Priory especially for their devout prayers on my behalf.” Then John proceeded to tell him all that had taken place, including the appointment offered to him by the King, and his doubts as to the acceptance of the same.

“You have doubts about that?” said the Prior. “It is

the greatest honour which has ever been offered, not only to the House of Norton, but to our order of Austin Canons. We can boast of a longer history than the Cistercians, at least in England. I know our rules are not the same, and that we try to assist the parishes around us, whilst the White Monks only preach in their own church, and are largely engaged in agriculture, which we leave to others. Those points, Father John, are all in thy favour, for our system creates experience in organisation, and greater breadth of mind. Besides, whilst thou hast been away, I have had a visit from Richard de Egerton, the Prior of Vale Royal, telling me the particulars of the great loss the Abbey has sustained by the death of Richard de Evesham, their fourth Abbot, and that in two or three years' more time the Abbey Church and buildings will be ready for the formal opening. He told me—and I know it will interest you—how they arrived at their decision as to the selection of the new Abbot. It differs from ours. On the appointed day when the final vote had to be taken, after a solemn Mass, 'De Spiritu Sancto,' the great bell of the monastery called the monks into the Chapter House. Then the proceedings were begun by the singing of the 'Veni Creator,' with its versicle and prayer, and then Thomas Hamlet, the sacrist, read aloud the citation to all having the right to vote, followed by a roll call of the names of the monks. The Book of the Holy Gospels was then carried round, and each in succession laid his hand on the sacred page, kissed it, and swore to make choice of him whom in conscience he thought most worthy. After this, one Proctor Francis, as the canonical adviser of the community, read aloud the constitution of the general council, 'Quia propter,' and carefully explained the

various methods of election. Then the religious, finding there was a difficulty in selecting one of their own community with one mind, determined to proceed by the method called 'compromise,' which placed the choice in the hands of some individual of note, and unanimously named His Majesty the King, Edward II., who was then visiting at Halton Castle, to make choice of their Abbot. Further the Prior told me that he was then on his way to Halton to make this submission to His Majesty, and I just mentioned your name. John, I never told you before, but you undoubtedly have great literary qualifications, also possess a wonderful power of organisation, a gentle spirit, a holy zeal, which few men of our or any other Order enjoy. If, therefore, the King hath offered thee the vacancy, take it. They will want a really good man, just when these great buildings are opened, and our great Edward of Blessed Memory will know that his son, the present King (whom God defend), hath made a wise choice, and one who can rule the great Church our first Edward founded."

"Ah! my Lord Prior," said Father John, "this is a new departure; when before has an Augustinian Canon been made Abbot of a Cistercian Abbey? How am I to know their new rules, and how carry them out? My Lord, you are more than kind in speaking of me as you have done, and I fear that I don't deserve one half you have said. Besides, at Vale Royal I am responsible for many duties outside the Abbey, and I do hear that the tenants at Darnhall be somewhat awkward to deal with, and have already given trouble to Richard the late Abbot there."

"By St. Christopher," said the Prior, "all this shows that a man of more than ordinary capacity ought to be

appointed, and, John, you are just fitted for it. You need never fear the rules of their order. They are possibly a bit more severe than ours, but you will combine austerity with amiability, decision with diplomacy, and the Cross with Christ."

"Well," said John, "even if I could soar so high, which I much fear, what, my Lord Prior—what—what shall I do with Ida?"

"Ah! now I see what is troubling thee. Is she not going to stay at St. Mary's Convent?"

"Well, she may be," said John, "but, knowing all the trouble she has gone through and that Barny de Gresford is still alive, she needs some protection. I feel that I am more than anyone responsible for her safety, and also for the welfare of her mother. I ought not only to know that both of them will be well provided for, but I ought to see that it is so. If I felt sure that no harm would come to them, I might try to do my best, but—but——"

"But what, John?" said the Prior. "I can quite understand the interest you take in them both, particularly after saving, not only the girl's life, but preventing her ignominy and shame. Let me remind you, John, that as Lord Abbot of Vale Royal you could have access to St. Mary's Convent, when otherwise it would be barred. Take my advice, go to our Church by thyself, and, in front of the High Altar ask His direction, and, God bless thee in thy ways. Remember:—

' If force should thee o'erpower
Search for little Daisy flower
In Vale Royal's belfry tower.'

John went out alone, along the cloister wall to the church door, and in the solitude of sweetest silence.

bowed himself humbly and lowly before the Altar of God, praying for His guidance. How the tears fell ! What a struggle there was going on ! How he pictured the scene when he had last been there as the distressed Joseph. Then he rose a man—no longer simple Father John of Norton Priory, but, Peter, soon to be fifth Lord Abbot of Vale Royal—unwilling any longer to offer resistance to what appeared to be the will of God.



CHAPTER XXIV.

THE LORD ABBOT'S SERMON.

"Nothing can justify a long sermon. If it be a good one, it need not be long: and if it be a bad one, it ought not to be long."

—*Lamont.*

WEEKS passed by, whilst Abbot Peter strove to acquaint himself with the new duties he was about to undertake. His appointment had to be confirmed by His Holiness the Pope. A messenger had to be despatched to the Abbot of Doré, the visitor of the Abbey, and also to Rome, to obtain the legal licences necessary before the ceremony of benediction could take place. The affairs of the Abbey were unsettled until the appointment had been confirmed. Meanwhile the Abbot-elect occupied the chambers of the Prior of Vale Royal, instead of the great Abbatial lodgings, which were not quite completed. During that probationary period, no one was entitled to solicit the monastic habit from him, or any necessaries of life, as a test of his future liberality. He utilized it by studying the history of the foundation of the Abbey and the lives of the four Abbots who had preceded. He tabulated the annual revenue and expenditure of the Abbey, showing that the income at that time, amounted to £248 17s. and the expenditure to £200, leaving a balance of £48 17s., "out of which," he writes, "twenty monks with the Abbot can hardly be maintained according to the poor way of living in the district." There

would, however, be, in addition, the benefits derived from the cultivation of the lands actually in hand. The Abbey Church was not completed, and some of the necessary monastic buildings not even commenced. He remembered that its illustrious founder desired and intended that "no monastery should be more royal than this one," and that "the church should be the finest in the world." Alas! that founder was dead, and his bones were then and are still lying in the chapel of St. Edward the Confessor in Westminster Abbey, near to the tombs of his father, King Henry III., and his beloved wife, Queen Eleanor of Castile. Every economy, therefore, had to be exercised; no loss of revenue could be allowed; all—all was wanted—not for the Abbot and his twenty monks, but for the Church and the love of the Virgin—once personified by Ida—and her beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Not a moment's time was lost. Day and night, religious and secular duties divided his attention.

Shortly, the messenger, with the Bull of Confirmation of his appointment, arrived, and the full ceremony of his initiation was arranged to take place. The church was crowded. The tenants and other people came flocking from miles around to see the beloved Canon of Norton Priory—the hero who had rescued Ida—consecrated Lord Abbot of Vale Royal; henceforth to be their temporal Lord and spiritual Father. The brethren met in the Chapter House, accompanied by Richard, Abbot of Abbey Doré, the visitor. The Papal confirmation was read—the Precentor intoned the *Te Deum*, and the procession wended its way, chanting the hymn from the Chapter to the church, leading the Abbot-elect. See how his head is bowed and bent, yet how well he wears the beautiful

chasuble worked so beautifully by the sisters of St. Mary's Nunnery, who seem to have been guided by a heavenly inspiration. The soft cadence of that processional chant is taken up by a thousand or more voices, some strong and lusty, others sweet and pensive, and the tones are re-echoed from the lofty roof—on, on to heaven itself. The few steps leading to the choir are ascended. Abbots and Priors are there from all the neighbouring monasteries. The bright gleam of sunshine enriches all their vestments; a gleam—a ray—falls upon the High Altar itself, where lie the mitre and crozier of episcopal office. Soon the *Te Deum* ends with the last Amen. A notary public, at the request of the Prior and the brethren, turns to the people, and from the choir steps reads the Latin proclamation of the due election of the new Abbot. He signifies with all humility his acceptance of the high office. Sir Peter de Dutton and the Lord Prior of Norton testify to his fitness, tell of his virtues, his character and courage, and his unfailing kindness of heart, at which there is a hum of satisfaction from the great public crowd. The Abbot of Doré then reads the rules of the Chapter, requiring the elect to “refrain his manners from evil; to preserve Divine affairs; to instruct others; to maintain chastity and sobriety, and obey His Holiness the Pope and his successors.” Carpets have already been laid in front of the altar, before which the Abbot-elect lies prostrate, as a symbol of his own subjection, whilst litanies and prayers on his behalf are chanted. Then he rises, the mitre is placed upon his head and the crozier in his right hand. The next ceremony is his formal admission. Abbot Peter proceeded to the outer door, which was shut. There he put off his shoes, walked barefooted, knocked for admission,

and on receiving a reply granting the same, he proceeds with devotion and giving of thanks to meet the brethren who advance to receive him. He is introduced to the choir and placed in his stall. The monks, according to seniority, even of another House, kneeling, give him the kiss of peace upon his hand, and, afterwards, rising, upon the mouth. He then enters the choir, puts on his shoes in the vestiary; a chapter is held, and Abbot Peter preached his first sermon to his brethren and the people. Ascending the pulpit, without the heavy and cumbersome mitre and crozier, he turned to the crowded nave, and, with clear rich voice, announced as his text:—"For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden."

"This part of the Magnificat, or song of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is intended to remind us that nobility of character is not dependent upon nobility of birth or descent. A thousand or more years ago the civilised nations of the earth were looking forward to and anticipating the birth of a Prince, who should be the Saviour of the world; one who was 'to grow up as a tender plant and as a root out of the dry ground.' The Lord God did not, as was expected, select one of the great historic cities—not even Jerusalem—to be the scene of this expected nativity, but a small unknown village called Bethlehem. The Jews anticipated that the Royalty of Heaven would be born in a palace, instead of which it was a stable. They looked for costly vestments, in the place of which were mere swaddling clothes. Such a Son they thought must have a Queen mother, yet it was only a handmaiden of low estate. But what babe—be he prince or peasant—before or since, has ever been heralded by a star in the East, which traversed that midnight sky till 'it came and stood over where the

young child was' ? Why was such a natural event, common since the foundation of the world, accompanied on this occasion by 'a multitude of the heavenly host,' singing in sweet angelic cadence, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men' ? Yet His first ride, by way of flight, was upon an ass ; His last, by way of triumph, upon a colt, the foal of an ass. If the handmaiden were of low estate, what of the Son ? Was anything more degrading than when the crowd from Jerusalem cried for the release of Barabbas the thief, rather than Christ ? Did not they spit upon Him ? Was He not struck by one of the officers 'with the palm of his hand' ? Was He not nailed to the cross and crucified, His seamless garment, like the blessed chasuble I wear, taken from Him and divided into four parts, for which the common soldiers cast lots ? This was a thousand years ago. Yet still He lives, and so doth the handmaiden of low estate. This beautiful church, not yet quite completed, is dedicated to her memory and to the praise of her only Son. If there be any handmaiden here of low estate, who conceiveth to herself the part of humility and lowliness in the Church of Christ—if there be any common soldier ready to strike the risen Lord——"

The Abbot could not finish the sentence. There was a great commotion in the crowd. He saw at once the cause—there was Ida, swooning in the central aisle of the great nave, and, standing over her, Sir Barny de Gresford, who was attempting to put a rope round her body, evidently with a view of carrying her forcibly away. Quickly descending from the pulpit, the Abbot advanced towards them, holding his crosier in one hand and the cross in the other, and called out loudly and austere,ly, "Begone !" at which

Sir Barny just as quickly fled, leaving poor Ida where she had fallen. Turning to his audience, the Abbot repeated calmly and clearly, “ ‘For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden.’ ” And the large congregation, muttering vengeance, dispersed, remembering for ever the short text, the bold sermon and its practical application.



CHAPTER XXV.

IDA AGAIN.

“Woman’s honour
Is nice as ermine,—will not bear a soil.”

—*Dryden.*

THE Abbot called out, “Brother Simon, do thou fetch a cup of cold water at once.”

He then proceeded carefully and gently to unloose the garments around her neck and throat, and taking off the magnificently worked chasuble he was wearing, folded it up, placed it under poor Ida’s head, to form the softest and daintiest of pillows. Her eyes were fast closed and she was gasping for breath. The rigid lines of her face betokened traits of terror and fright. He bathed her forehead with the water and moistened her lips and tongue. “Give her air; don’t stand round her; open all the doors,” quietly said the Abbot, and his orders were quickly obeyed by the affrighted monks. “Bring some of the holy sacramental wine,” was another request. This seemed to give some relief, for she gradually opened her eyes and seemed to wish to try to speak. The Abbot bent down, placing his ear close to her mouth. All he could hear was just one word—“John!”

What was to be done?

After she had sufficiently recovered the Abbot stated there was no alternative but to carry her to his new house,

which had never before been occupied, but the Visitor, the Abbot of Doré, promptly pointed out that such a proceeding would be entirely contrary to Cistercian rules of propriety, which forbade any female to stay in the Abbey for a single night. "Dost thou not remember," he said, "that when Edward, our most gracious founder, being then only seven years of age, was present with his father and mother at the opening of our Abbey of Beaulieu, he was taken ill and he and the Queen Mother stayed in the infirmary for three weeks, the Prior and the Cellarer were dismissed by the Visitor for permitting even a Queen to stay in the infirmary of the Abbey. How then can we permit this request for this unknown girl, evidently of the common order, to stay in the Abbot's house, which, if any one should occupy, should be either thee or me?"

The reply direct was, "'For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden.' My Lord Abbot of Doré, I express to thee most sincerely my warmest thanks for the sincere expression of the practical application of thy Christian virtues. This unknown girl happens to be known to me and she is not of the common order. See this," lifting from her breast a beautiful ivory cross. "See this," pointing to a girdle round her body, betokening she was a novice in the Benedictine Nunnery at Chester. "Besides, my Lord Abbot of Doré, I would remind thee that thou art quoting a precedent which is grey with a century of age: another and greater reason for the dismissal of the Prior and Cellarer of Beaulieu was that flesh meat was secretly supplied to the Queen Mother in that infirmary, whereas, if it had been done openly, pardon might have been asked and obtained. Would any one of us be here if Prince Edward, our Royal Founder of sweet

memory, had not at Beaulieu been looked after during his illness by his own mother the Queen? Would this Royal Abbey have been built if the Prince had been allowed to pine and die for want of a mother's love and attention?"

"Right well dost thou put thy case," replied the Abbot of Doré, "and we at Abbey Doré are much indebted ourselves to this royal Prince. We assisted him to escape from the hands of the mighty barons of England; one of our holy brethren carried messages to him in prison, and he, in return, at his own cost and expense, sent twelve of the monks from Doré to Cheshire to found this Abbey some fifty years ago. One of our brethren, John Champneys, was first Abbot here. I mean no disrespect to such a noble and royal founder. But the law of the Cistercians must be obeyed and, as Visitor here, I should be obliged to report any breach of the rules."

"Most holy Abbot," said the Abbot of Vale Royal, "I respect thy power and authority. Is not the law of the Cistercians founded upon the law of Christ? Is not a woman's life as dear to our beloved Saviour as that of a man? You say that no woman under any circumstances is to stay with us."

"Yes; most certainly, yes," was the reply.

"Then if the Queen of Heaven, the Blessed Virgin, our Holy Mother and patron Saint, to whom this church is honourably dedicated, were to appear, clothed with life, thou wouldst thrust her out, although she had nowhere to lay her head! Thou wouldst banish the real true Virgin, and yet introduce, as we have done, in this very church, rude figures of her in wax and paint and stone. My Lord Abbot, I will not believe it of thee. I take the risk. I appeal, if need be, to the Chapter.

Further, if thou desirest my legal defence, which I value less than my defence on Christian lines, I would remind thee, holy Abbot of Doré, that the part of the Abbey where I am proposing to send this sick girl hath not yet been opened, consecrated or dedicated as part of any abbey attached to the great Cistercian Order. Therefore I submit that my action is not only Christian but lawful. Take her, Brothers Simon and James, carefully to the Abbot's House, to the best apartments, which alone are fit to receive this figure of the Virgin in the flesh, and I will follow her like Joseph of old, to see that no harm shall befall her. Send for one of my tenant's daughters best fitted to attend to her and all she requires."

Gathering up his vestments with the dignity of a prince, and the authority of a king, he slowly followed the two monks carrying the frightened girl, leaving his Visitor and the other brethren to acknowledge that their new Abbot was a man to be respected and honoured.

The Abbot's dormitory was a part of a new stone building, a short distance away from the silent cloister. Ida was placed upon a bed—not nearly so comfortable as the one she had been accustomed to at St. Mary's Nunnery. Presently, Elsie de Jacson, the pretty daughter of the Abbot's Seneschal, or Chief Steward, arrived to take charge of her. Some hot vegetable soup was brought to the door of the apartment by Simon; also some buttered eggs, beautifully cooked, and looking so inviting; and there in a small glass was a mouthful of fine red wine, brought to the port of Chester from Gascony, a subdued province of France, then belonging to England, but better known to-day by the name of its capital city, Bordeaux.

Even Simon whispered to Elsie, "How is she? May the Virgin protect her."

"Yes, Simon," said Elsie, "many thanks for your trouble, but if the Virgin didn't look after us women, I am certain sure you monks wouldn't." At which Simon put his first finger to his mouth and whispered stealthily, looking along the corridor with eyes turned both ways, "I would, and you too." "Get off with you, Simon; if the new Abbot (God bless him!) hadn't stuck up for this poor maiden, thou wouldst have let her sleep in the woods all night and then buried her with a big long face on the morrow. You call that being a Christian monk, do you? I don't. I say that such a monk ought to go to the Devil—I do."

"Well, well, Elsie," said Simon, "what's a poor monk to do when the two Abbots don't agree?"

"Oh, yes! I say, be a man, or what is evidently better for the sick—be a woman."

"I say, Elsie, what's her name?"

"Now, Simon, how am I to know? So off with you. I'll get her well in a day or two, and then, just like another woman, she'll be sure to talk and tell me. You just see that we have the best of every bit of food up here, Simon, and then I'll tell you something the next time you're strong enough to speak your own mind. Now go."

What with Elsie's lovable attention and nursing and Simon's soup and buttered eggs, increased gradually to trout from the park brook and chickens from the Earnslow Grange, Ida was, in a week or two, almost herself again, but terribly afraid of being left alone. She was taken to the adjoining room, the Abbot's Parlour, which overlooked the Lady's Wood and the Abbey Stew or Fishpond, formed

by the backing up of a little rivulet of running water, the overflow from which was a pretty little cascade emptying itself lower down the valley into the River Weaver, which was the eastern boundary of the Abbey lands.

The bright sun was shining, ripening the corn growing on the Abbey lands. In one part, which was more advanced than the others, could be seen the conversi, or secular monks, wearing the white cowl and black scapular, cutting the crops and binding the fine sheaves into battens and stacking them for the necessary hardening of the grain. Presently all work was stayed, and, in response to the Abbey bell, they all fell on their knees, strong lusty voices joined in unison singing—"Benedicite, omnia opera." With what double voice and tone, Ida could hear, "O ye winter and summer, bless ye the Lord; praise Him and magnify Him for ever." Then she would heave a great sigh and think of her own winters and summers.

These lay brethren could not read or write, but they could sing, and recite from memory, the beautiful psalms of David. In addition they could and did attend to the flocks and herds of the community, and were its tailors, shoemakers and blacksmiths.

The relations between the religious and the lay brethren were of the closest kind. Instead of being treated as slaves, as they were by the feudal lords, these poor children of the soil were looked upon as brothers, and, by a special law of the Order, were to partake in all spiritual advantages, as though they were monks, which in fact they were in all but the name, for they made their vows in the presence of the Abbot like other brethren. Their work had to be conducted in silence, but the recent event associated

with the induction of the new Abbot had necessarily occasioned some comment.

"I say, Adam," said one of them, called Jerome, "dost thou see that girl as fainted at the Benedictum sitting at the Abbot's Parlour window? She's just watchin' us, and us have ne'er bin watched afore."

"Well, Jerome," said Adam, "what be that? Thou be workin' and so be I, if thou'll only ger on w'out stoppin'."

"Aye, aye, all reet, Adam; but there's a lot o' talk about her and the Abbot."

"Well, well, Jerome, thou shouldna listen to talk as dunno consarn thee."

"Aye, Adam, but if yo can shut yer mouth, yer conna stop yer ears, an' I heerd as the new Abbot had seen this girl afore hoo come here, an' he canna keep his eyes off her."

"P'raps so, Jeremy, but p'raps he's a reason for it."

"Aye, that he han; people say he's head and ears i' love with her."

"Nay, now thou'rt wrong, Jerry; our Abbot is a man as can stick up for a woman when everybody else's back is turned agin her. He's like our Saviour when He asked someone even to throw the first stone, and they couldna do it. I heerd as he'd bin very good to that pretty girl, and if it hadna bin for Peter she would ha' bin killed."

"Aye, but just look, Adam, wi'out takin' thine eyes off the rake; there's Peter hissels standin' by her side wi' his hand in hers."

"An', Jerry, just behind 'em both is Elsie, who's lookin' after the girl. Fie upon yer thoughts; yer'd make a Jew eat pig, yer would, an' I dunno believe the Holy Mother 'ud be able for to do that. Jerry, you've a lot of bad

thoughts about thee, and thou'd better go an' see Simon an' confess.

"Aye, but see, mon, he's bringin' her across the cloister in the direction of this kern field, and he's gotten hold of her arm ! See, they bin walkin' slowly and talkin' smoothly, comin' here where we bin."

There sure enough were the Abbot and Ida walking across the kitchen garden on to where Jerry and Adam were working. She was not strong enough to walk alone, so the Abbot was simply, yet gently, supporting her. The colour had left her cheeks, and her lips had lost the deep red of youth. True, there was the faintest trace of a sweet blush, and the warm sun, with a light gentle breeze, had created a summer smile. The red around her eyes, the creases above, the firm set lips below, and the haggard look showed the terrific change which had taken place, so Abbot Peter—the sainted Father John—did what no other Father in God, wearing the Cistercian garb, had ventured to do—took this lonesome, frightened Ida, into the fields of beauty. There the harrowed furrows were filled with the fruits of fertility, and there the quiet of the monastery would give her that rest, repose and change she so much needed.

Carefully the Abbot took off his black scapular, and placed it on the ground, and just as carefully he seated the gentle Ida upon it, thinking to himself that it couldn't be used for a better purpose. He sat down by her side and just supported her weak back with his strong arm, so that she should be comfortable without inconvenience to herself.

Presently the graceful Elsie came tripping along, carrying some new milk and a beautiful little mould of blanchmange, which Ida had to take "to get strong again,"

as Elsie so gently urged, and who, when Ida had partaken of the viands, just as gracefully retired.

It was just such a day and such a scene from which rest might be obtained. To the immediate front there were the silent workers cutting the corn, further in the distance the low lying valley of the river, with its sulky uneventful stream, never dreaming of salt, steam or soda ash. Further away could just be seen the top of the tower of St. Helen's Church at Witton, with a big windmill a little to the left of it. Close to was the Calvary, with its huge cross some twenty or thirty feet high, on the summit of the bank of the Lady Wood, and down below lay, in a sepulchre, the stone-cut figure of the buried Lord. On the left was Weaverham Church, and on the right the square tower of St. Chad's Church at Over, situate as it then was in the centre of the quiet village of that name. Under its shadow was the open market created by the charter of King Edward. Far out in the distance, as to-day, was the clear-cut escarpment in the Staffordshire hills, known still as Mow Cop.

The two opposite poles, the learned Abbot Peter and the sincerely innocent Ida, were seated together on the ground, quite happy and contented. The butterflies were basking in the sunshine, and the birds twittering with all the sense of joy and freedom which prevails in a world where man alone is wrongly reputed to be vile.

"Ida," said the Abbot, "you are now strong and well enough to tell me how and why you came here. You can't imagine the trouble I have had in getting you placed in my chambers, and the dire consequences which are threatened. But I am delighted to see you, and pleased to know that nothing worse has happened to you."

"Oh ! Father John," she replied, with a dainty apology for a smile—"I beg your Lordship's pardon, I mean my Lord Abbot——"

"No, no, Ida, don't begin that way. When we are alone, just call me as you used to do—Father John. I really did not care to be Lord Abbot, but to please others, to serve God and the King, I consented, but I shall always be the same to you."

"Well, Father John, that is almost as sweet a speech as Elsie can make. I heard at St. Mary's of your intended consecration to the holy office of Lord Abbot, and I asked my Lady Superior to let me go home for a week, and from there I came here to hear you preach your first sermon at Vale Royal."

"Yes, yes, Ida ; but how did you get here from home, and how did you meet that bad man, Barnaby de Gresford ?"

"Oh ! Father John, about that, I walked here. You must not forget that my mother is now living on the Dutton estate, not so far away as Kingsley. Just when I got to the Abbey gate, I saw that brute Gresford in front of me, so I kept out of his sight, and then when I got into the Abbey Church I found to my horror—save me, Mary ! —I was standing in the nave in front of him. Presently, after you had commenced your sermon, I felt something touch me, and I saw he was getting a rope ready to bind me and carry me off, and I rushed into the central passage of the nave, and, as you know, tumbled down and fainted. I am so sorry I stopped you in the middle of your fine sermon. I don't know how you can ever forgive me. I am always giving you such a lot of trouble."

"I hope you won't think so," said the Abbot. "Think

how you have helped me—if it really be a blessing to be Lord Abbot. It is just possible that if I had not met you and afterwards assisted you in the Dutton woods, and looked after you during the water joust and since, I should not have come under the King's notice, and he never would have offered me this place. And now—now—I have—I have got it—I don't know what to do."

"Don't know what to do, Father John! You usually act with such decision and judgment, I don't understand that observation. Why, of course you must do your duty."

"Ah, yes, Ida, but what about you?"

"About me?" said Ida.

"Yes, about you," said the Abbot.

"Ah, yes, Father John—John—John—we must each go our own way; we must each do our own duty, and may the Holy—Holy Mother help us both."

Scarce had the last word left her lips before she broke into a flood of tears, and buried her head in the Abbot's white cowl.

There was a cloud in the sunshine and, after the downfall, each knew there would not be the faintest trace of the beautiful rainbow, with its rays of hope for the future.

Duty! That hard word pierced the Cistercian Abbot worse than a thousand arrows.

Duty! What a word it is when one wants to do something other than one's duty. Aye, there's the rub.

"I slept and dreamed that life was Beauty,
I woke and found that life was Duty."

The great Abbot needed the guidance and strength of this innocent, inexperienced maid, so he said: "Ah, Ida—Ida; yes, one must perforce do one's duty, but tell me, have—have I no duty to you?"

“Yes, John—dear John,” she whispered into his ear; “let me call you so just once—just this once—only once. You can look after me a little—you can love me if you will; you can see me with the other sisters at St. Mary’s; you can tell me and lecture me as to what is wrong and what is right, and when the time comes you can bury me. Bury me, John, near the High Altar, where you will often be, so that I shall be near you—able to hear you when you preach again and whisper sweet words of duty and hope to others. The cloud will only be a presage to the brightest rainbow of our lives, to be followed by sunshine for ever and ever. In this way, dear John, you will have regard to the low estate of your poor little handmaiden.”

Sometimes the strings of life break with a sudden snap, but often—too often—there is a long tension, which simply wears them slowly away. The perpetual sunshine was not to come too quickly. Life’s rough uneven path must be trodden first.

But see, far away in the distance, coming from the direction of the flowing Weaver, which could then boast of silvery salmon at Vale Royal, there was a horseman approaching on a galloping steed. Apparently he was dressed as a knight-errant, but without an attendant squire. He was full of life, held a firm and well balanced seat, notwithstanding the gambols and play of the animal. Over hedge and ditch and fence he came, until he arrived on the wheat lands where the lay brethren were industriously cutting the corn. Noticing the Abbot and Ida, he dismounted quickly and gracefully, and saluted both by taking off and holding his hat in his hand.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE ABBOT AND THE STRANGER.

“Every one that flatters thee,
Is no friend in misery :
Words are easy, like the wind ;
Faithful friends are hard to find.”

—*Shakespeare.*

“Most holy Abbot,” said the stranger, “I make bold to form thy acquaintance, for thy reputation for wisdom, wit and welcome hath extended outside the vast domains of this great Abbey. I have unfortunately lost my way and my friends, and I crave leave to ask for the shelter of thy noble house for one night.”

“Sir,” said the Abbot, “our Guestmaster will certainly attend to thy requirements as far as circumstances will permit. I can only hope that thy short stay here will be pleasant and agreeable.” Then, calling Jeremy to him, he directed the stranger’s horse to be taken to the Abbey stables and well looked after.

The stranger still lingered. He was tall and erect, well proportioned and strongly built, in the prime of life. His face was ruddy, his hair jet black. His dress and courtly manner betokened noble birth. There was, however, a gleam about the eyes which seemed somewhat unnatural, and his fingers tapered to an unusual length. He appeared anxious to renew the conversation, so the Abbot asked him as to his travels and destination.

"My Lord Abbot," said the stranger, "I have just journeyed from Chester, through the forest of Delamere, where, seeing a fine stag, I could not, forsooth, allow him to wander alone, so he gave me and my horse a good run through the Dutton Woods, where I unfortunately lost the beast, but found an old friend who did not recognise me, Sir Peter de Dutton, who I understand is a mutual acquaintance."

"So you know my namesake, Sir Peter, do you? Is he quite well and in the enjoyment of good health?"

"Yes, my Lord, he seemed to be; but I did not tarry there very long, for to-morrow, I journey on to the Forest of Macclesfield, where I am hoping for several days' sport with the wild boar of that district."

"Ah, well, my stranger friend, it be just possible," said the Abbot, with a view of studying the effect, "my old friend, Sir Peter, may call in to see me this evening or to-morrow morning, and thou shalt have the pleasure of renewing his acquaintance."

Whereupon the stranger begged to be excused, stating he was somewhat tired with the exertions of the day, and he might have to depart at dawn the following morning.

The Abbot noticed a perceptible shudder and change when mention was made of Sir Peter's possible visit, and the keen sense of judgment and decision he possessed enabled him to form mental conclusions which were not altogether appreciative of the new guest. On his return to the Abbey with Ida, he bade her good-night, accompanied with solemn injunctions to get a good night's rest, adding by way of comfort, that, as she must be tired with her first visit to the fields after her recent illness, it would be better if her friend, Elsie de Jacson, slept in

the same room so that she could immediately attend to any requirements she had during the night. He then sent for the Guestmaster, giving him special instructions to look well after the stranger, adding significantly and emphatically: "Be sure to see that the large chamber crucifix which Sir Peter de Dutton gave to the Abbey be placed prominently in his room, so that our stranger friend may see the Blessed Lord when he entereth and when he goeth forth to leave us." The Guestmaster bowed low, and assured his Lordship his wishes would be attended to.

Soon the last rays of the setting sun had gone, and the bright golden beams of the harvest moon were lighting up the architectural features of the monastic buildings. Compline had been sung, the curfew bell rung, and the monks, silently stealing through the cloister, retired to their dormitory. The everlasting light was shining in front of the High Altar. Deep shadows were formed—for one cannot have even a ray of moonlight without a shadow. Light and shade bring life into the artist's picture. Life and death are the light and shade of reality. Just as night has followed day from the time of creation, so surely has death followed life. As the shade brings out the light, so sleep is the light of life. What a quiet haven of rest and repose Vale Royal was, too! Its very seclusion was a temptation to the ascetic; its calm and repose an attraction to the weary—all oblivious to the world's passing pageant, and freed from its vices, vanities and woes. The sacred pavements, though deserted now, were trodden at the stated hours by those who "taught the unlettered world its Maker's praise."

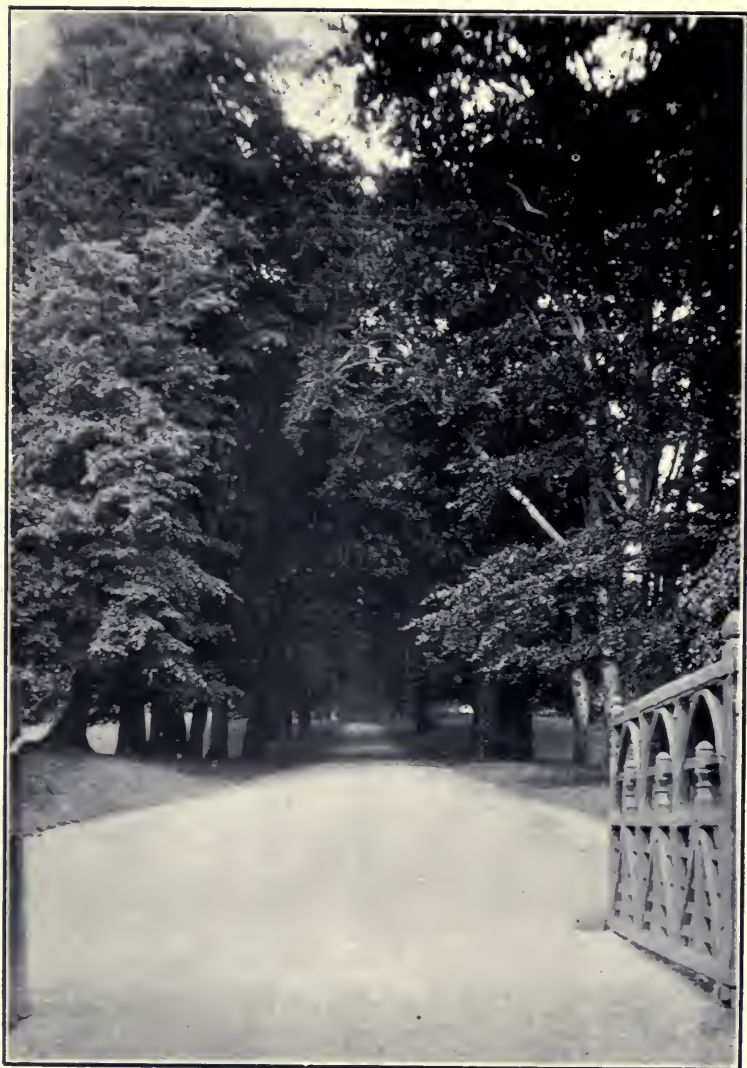
But there was a deeper, darker shadow. The Guest-

master had been awakened by a great noise which scared him. He called his assistant, and both proceeded to examine the different parts of the guest-house. In the stranger's chamber there was Sir Peter de Dutton's beautiful crucifix lying smashed to atoms on the floor. The bed was empty; it had never been occupied; the window was wide open. There was commotion in the cloister; the great bell of the monastery was clanging loudly and quickly, denoting danger.

Down below could be seen the stranger and another man pushing violently in front of them Ida and her attendant, Elsie de Jacson. Both were bound tightly with cords and their mouths closed with cloths to prevent speech and noise. The Abbot alone was interposing, unarmed and unassisted. Two horses were waiting outside ready saddled, evidently to assist the intruders to escape. Soon the Guestmaster and his assistant were in the fray, followed by all the monks. Simon had rushed into the church and fetched the large altar cross, which he carried before him, and which he believed more powerful than any sword. Ida and Elsie had swooned and were helpless.

"What mean you, stranger, by this disturbance?" shouted the Abbot.

The stranger and his accomplice did not reply, but tugged all the harder, using almost superhuman strength to get their quarry on to the saddles; but at last, the strength of numbers, and Simon's cross right in the face of the stranger, prevailed, and poor Ida and Elsie were left lying on the ground like two sacks of winnowed chaff and with but little more life. The horsemen mounted, and then the Abbot saw in the bright moonlight the face of Barny de Gresford.



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Avenue leading to Vale Royal.

"By the Holy Mary! what brings you here, Gresford?" said the Abbot.

"My horse, to fetch my wife," shouted he in reply.

"And who be your friend?"

"The Devil, your guest," replied Gresford.

"Yes," replied the stranger, "and at the hour of Prime our vengeance and your trouble will be complete. Ida shall die and your weakness and my power shall be vindicated."

To this mysterious speech no answer could be given, for both horsemen stuck their spurs deep and were away down the Abbey Avenue before another word could be said.

On bended knees, every monk thanked God and the Holy Mother for the success which had attended their efforts.

Poor Ida, once more!

It seemed as though all the ill-luck of the world had concentrated itself on her to prevent her enjoying a moment's happiness, as though the sweetest flower in the garden of Cheshire must necessarily be bruised and beaten to death by unnatural winds and storms, or plucked up by the roots, just when the beautiful bloom of life was about to make the world brighter and happier, by its colour and fragrance.

Poor Father John again!

Poor Abbot Peter once more!

No! no! Not poor, not down in any sense. The Lord Abbot was a man who did not know defeat. Bold and brave, yet gentle as a gentleman. Warring daily against Death and the Devil, full of love for the Cross, he was a valiant Crusader against all the evil machinations of the world, the flesh and the devil. He was a true and trusted

knight, wearing the Christian armour which he believed to be impenetrable. Glass, to be transparent, must stand the test of a first fire and a second and a third. God and the Holy Mother had given him these trials to purge away the dross—the love of Ida—and leave only the love of God. His love must henceforth be placed on a higher plane and be of heaven, and not of earth. And after all, that was what Ida had been trying to teach him, but under another, harsher, name—Duty. And the first duty of these monks was to carry, as carefully as possible, the two frail personages of Ida and Elsie to the Abbot's quarters, from which they had been so ruthlessly dragged. A messenger was despatched to bring the mothers of the two invalids to attend to their requirements, and soon, as Simon said, instead of having two women here, they had got four. What would the founder of their order, St. Robert, or their visitor, the Abbot of Doré, say? He solaced himself by the knowledge that the strict rules of the Order were not now so rigidly adhered to. Soups and milk and wine were served from the Abbey kitchen by willing hands, for both Ida and Elsie by their long stay had become general favourites.

They both explained how, whilst they were fast asleep, Barny and his master must have entered their room, tied their mouths up so that they could not scream, then secured their limbs with ropes and dragged them down into the cloister. The Abbot, being somewhat uneasy as to the strange guest who had arrived, had been on the alert, otherwise disaster must have overtaken both Ida and Elsie. Poor girls! they were terribly frightened.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LEGEND OF OVER CHURCH.

A legend is exaggerated fiction bound up with the transparent truths of tradition.

IN the Charter granted by Edward, eldest son of Henry III., in 1269, to the new Cistercian Monastery at Dernhall, the Prince grants to the monks "the manors of Dernhall and Over," the former being some two or three miles from Vale Royal. In 1299, a Charter is granted by the same Prince, after he became King Edward the First, to the Abbot and Convent of Vale Royal, which recites the founding of the Abbey at Dernhall "upon a vow we once made being in danger of shipwreck." The Charter then goes on to state that at the request of the Abbot and Monks of Dernhall Abbey "we have newly founded the same Abbey in a more convenient place, not far distant from the foresaid place of Dernhall, which was called Whetenhalews and Manechenewro; and which place we have caused to be named the Vale Royal." The Charter then grants to the Abbot and Convent of Vale Royal, "all the manors of Dernhall and Over, . . . also the whole manor of Weverham, with the advowson of the church of the same town." Thus it is clear that Vale Royal had no rights in respect of the church at Over, the presentations to that church being vested in the Convent of St. Mary's Nunnery at Chester.

The Rectory of Over, and no doubt with it the advowson of Over Church, was given to the Nunnery in 1162 by the fifth Norman Earl of Chester, Hugh Cyveliok, who succeeded his father, Earl Randle Gernons, the founder of the Nunnery. We only know of this benefaction by a reference to it in the deed of confirmation of the succeeding Earl Randle Blunderville, who confirms the church of "Huvre" (as it is pronounced to this day by all so-called illiterates) which his father, Hugh, had granted to them in free alms. Earl Hugh had a daughter named Amicia. The contract for her marriage with Ralph de Meinilwarin is, by Beaumont, a learned historian of Cheshire, thought to have been signed at Darnhall; if so the marriage might possibly have taken place in Over Church. This marriage gave rise in the seventeenth century to one of the most memorable genealogical controversies on record. The combatants were the celebrated Sir Peter Leycester, Baronet, a name venerated by all Cheshire antiquaries, who was of opinion that Amicia was born out of wedlock. and Sir Thomas Mainwaring, Baronet, who maintained the opposite part. The controversy began in 1672 and ended in 1677. The whole country "watched their skill in the use of their literary weapons, applauded or condemned each tilt in the combat, and awaited with interest the final result." The combatants ultimately found a common ground of agreement, in the fact that whether the lady in question was base issue according to the Canon law or not, there could be no doubt that her husband, Ralph de Meinilwarin, or Ralph Mainwaring, the Justiciar of Chester and the possessor of the whole or the greater part of seventeen Cheshire manors, besides other possessions elsewhere, was

the head of a stock descended from a fellow soldier of Hugh Lupus, the nephew of the Norman Conqueror and first Palatine Earl of Chester. These and other events connected with Over Church marked it out in bygone days as the scene of interesting reminiscences, even prior to the foundation of Vale Royal, or the legendary and traditional removal, the facts associated with which are about to be related. It was originally situate in the centre of the village of Over; it was associated with a Benedictine Nunnery, and the Benedictines were in favour of erecting their abbeys and churches in the centres of population and not in secluded places like the Cistercians. It was within a mile or two from the Abbey, from which the tower could be distinctly seen; it was surrounded by the Abbey lands, and the Abbey tenants living in the village of Over were accustomed to attend there as well as the mighty Earls occupying the Norman manor house at Darnhall. The Abbot of Vale Royal took a paternal interest in its welfare. His Bailiff or Seneschal for Over, afterwards known as the Mayor of Over, attended this church occasionally in state to represent the Abbot. To the Mayors subsequently descended the jocular privilege, well-known to-day, that if there were three pigs lying down in any street in the borough, His Worship had the legal right to disturb the middle one and lie down in the same place. This church, therefore, had the special protection of St. Mary's Nunnery as well as the Abbot of Vale Royal. In fact the tithes of Over were leased by the Nunnery to the Abbey. There was a sort of joint interest in its welfare and spiritual prosperity. Now when Abbot Peter ruled at Vale Royal, Dominus Thomas de Dutton was Rector in charge of Over Church.

This was the state of matters on the night of the visit

of De Gresford and his master to Vale Royal. "At the hour of Prime, our vengeance and your trouble will be complete," was the mysterious curse uttered by the stranger guest. The Abbot and his brethren could not understand its meaning. After their gallop down the avenue leading to the Abbey, the two horsemen drew in their reins in the hollow below where St. Mary's Church at Whitegate then and now stands. The Devil—who always leads—was then dressed as a monk. He had been in advance, with Barny following a short distance behind.

"Well, by the Holy Mary," said Barny, "your expedition has failed again. Upon my soul, you promised most faithfully that Ida should be mine this very night, and we are just as far off as ever we were. 'Pon my soul, I don't believe a bit in your powers, specially when a cross is stuck under your nose."

"Soul! Barny de Gresford," was the reply; "soul, did you say? You have not got a thousandth part of one. By all the saints cast out of heaven, your soul is in my keeping. A hundred Abbots and a thousand crosses won't stop me from carrying out any purpose I wish, and by all the fallen archangels, I'll do it yet!"

"Then why, Devil, didn't you do it when you had the chance?" rejoined Barny.

"Why? Didn't I see her sweet face and her pitying look? Didn't I notice how she was suffering from the effects of your evil designs? Couldn't I guess how your folly had rubbed the bloom off her cheeks? And then I thought what a wretch you were; even a devil couldn't trust her with a double-dyed sinner like you; so, though I could have carried her away I didn't, and there's the honest truth for you once, Barny de Gresford!"

"Well," said Barny, "if that's the Devil's game, then, by the King, you and I part company."

"Part company, Barny! Ho! by St. Michael, that sounds good! I never part company with those who are mine. If you desire a closer acquaintance with my subjects, occupying my possessions, I can despatch you, body and soul, thither at once. Stir one yard, and you are there before you can utter a single word. The only doubt I have is whether you are not too bad to join them."

Barny did not move; he knew and feared his companion too much. He saw a determination which meant business. He could not stand the fiery steadfast gaze of his companion, so he simply gave a salute of cowardly subjection, and looked abased upon the ground, not venturing to utter a word.

The silence was broken by the Devil himself, who said: "My vengeance is not to be wreaked upon that innocent girl; if anything befalls her, it will not be my doing, but yours. I prefer to be matched against sterner stuff. I know that by deceitful words and wiles, I subdued and conquered the first woman God created; but I also remember that by the unbegotten Son of another woman, such words and wiles were reduced to weakness and submission. For as by Eve all die, even so by Mary shall all be made alive. Don't you understand now why I won't fight a woman? But bring me a thousand men—cowards like you—and they shall all—every one—feel the cut of my unsheathed double-edged sword. Go to, Barny, don't look snubbed. Across yonder is Over Church, under the special care of yon Abbot, St. Mary's Nunnery, and Sir Peter's brother, all special friends of yours. Go forward, knock off all the crosses inside and outside; don't

be frightened of the gargoyles sticking out from the tower to frighten evil spirits; climb to the highest pinnacle, look towards the Abbey, and I will show you—as I promised to do on Chester Rood-eye, and as I did do on one cross on Delamere Forest, henceforth to be known as the Headless Cross—my material power and strength by shifting this temple of stone, so that there shall be more weeping at Vale Royal, St. Mary's and Dutton Hall than if you had captured Ida a dozen times over. Does that suit you, Barny? Look up, man, and don't be a beast."

"Aye, aye," said Barny, "and whilst you are carrying out your wild cat schemes, and the monks are praying to prevent your success, I can gallop back with lightning speed and secure the girl you promised should be mine for ever."

"There you are again. By the Holy Mother, that is your choice, not mine," said the Devil. "Go on in advance, coward; there are crosses at the Beeches, at Marton Grange and at Salterswall, on the way to Over Church; knock 'em all down. I hate these crosses. When I see you on the top of the tower of the church I shall know that the way is all clear. Stay there until I come."

Barny needed no further instructions; he was off at a gallop. Horse and rider charged the cross at the Beeches, where the bier conveying departed saints had rested on the way to the place of burial. Again at Marton Grange, but the beautifully sculptured cross there fell lightly on the grass, just damaging the crocketed pinnacles, but otherwise leaving the protected statuary uninjured. The cross at Salterswall was not nearly so elaborate, but more firmly fixed in the socket base, there-

fore Barny had to use additional violence to secure its downfall.*

Arrived at the church, he found the Rector, Dominus Thomas de Dutton, working away at some illuminated manuscript work in the vestry, so he quickly secured him as a prisoner, by locking both the outer and inner doors. He then proceeded with much hesitation and fear, to destroy the carved crucifix over the altar, which seemed to speak to him in terms of wrath and passion. Climbing up to the belfry, he rang the great bell seven times as arranged with his companion. Up to the top of the tower he climbed, looked down upon the straw-thatched houses, the inmates of which were sleeping quietly, little thinking of the great event which was about to happen. He cast a look towards Vale Royal, and could just distinguish a light or two, burning in the dormitory and the Abbot's house, which he concluded still stored his life's treasure. Then climbing the embrasure, he nearly overbalanced himself by imagining one of the terrible gargoyles had opened its mouth and said something. He scanned the horizon in the direction of Whitegate to find an approaching horseman, but although the shades of night were disappearing and the rays of the rising sun were brightening the East, there was no sign of life or motion. Suddenly he looked up, and saw what seemed a large dark cloud approaching, spitting fire, and accompanied by a noise resembling repeated rolls of thunder. There was a terrible commotion in the air—hurricanes of hot wind seemed to blow, concentrated in funnel shaped form upon the church; the

*The socket bases of the crosses at Marton Grange and Salterswall can still be seen, the former just inside the gate leading to Marton Hall and the latter at the foot of the fingerpost at Salterswall.

tower began to reel and rock. Horror ! Not the knight-errant on his galloping steed ; not a human form, but an unearthly shape some sixty feet high, with huge projecting horns, rough bearded face like a goat, eyes which glistened like molten glass, reddened with vermilion ; outstretched wings which rivalled in length the aeroplanes of to-day ; long hairy arms with sinewy hands, with huge tapering fingers as hard as steel ; legs with cloven hoofs, and a forked tail of harpoon shape ! Barny was mesmerised ; he could neither stir nor speak. He shuddered all over ; his teeth chattered with fright. Nearer and nearer it came. Wheeling round in mid air, the immense form hovered over the sacred building, then, with extended arms which lengthened from their sockets like a telescope, the form caught hold of the eastern end of the edifice, and holding it with unflinching grasp, lifted it up bodily, higher and higher, steering with that powerful rudder of a tail in a south-easterly direction.

But see : the Abbot and monks of Vale Royal have assembled in their cloister, and their attention is drawn to this supernatural event. Stupefied with fear, they fall upon their knees, but the Abbot suddenly calls to Simon to fetch the highest cross in the church. Two monks go to assist him. Soon they arrive. The cross leads the way to the cornfield followed by the holy fathers. Floating in the air, higher than the church, reaching to heaven, could be heard the sweet strain of the "Venite, exultemus Domine." The Devil listens. In unison strong and clear rise the words "Let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation. . . . For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In His hand are all the corners of the earth, and the strength of the hills is His also."



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The Legend of Over Church.

*(Reproduced, by permission, from Egerton Leigh's
"Cheshire Ballads and Legends.")*

Simon and his assistants lift the cross higher and higher. With a leer and a hideous laugh and look, the approaching form frightens poor Barny out of his wits, and, receiving the force of an extra blow of hot stifling air, the villain throws himself from the tower, knocks off one of the gargoyles (which is missing to this day), only to meet the terrible fate of a sealed sinner. Turning to the monks, the Devil called out, "There's my strength ; more powerful for good even than yours. You have a prison, so have I. You punish bad men, so do I. You hang dishonest men on your gallows—a proof that you are a civilized race ; mine hang themselves, which is a proof I administer justice too. There's just one difference between your work and mine : By the cross, you try to raise men to the performance of good deeds and virtuous actions. I assist you by demonstrating the terrible result which happens to those who do not heed your words. This man Barny de Gresford was not fit to live. I did not want to kill him, but I did want him to kill himself, so I decided to frighten him into doing it, and that is why I determined to carry Over Church away. Now that he is done for I will let down the church to mother earth again. Do not think so badly of me after this ; I am only a necessary evil, helping you to carry out your good work."

With that, he quietly sailed away with the church, locating it in the secluded valley near Swanlow Lane, where it now stands, some mile away from the little village of Over, where it had formerly stood. The villagers awoke to find the change. None knew how it had occurred, until the monks told them the story exactly as it is related here. Everybody wondered ; some, but very few, doubted. Even these became believers, for the great chained Bible told

them that the devil went about "as a roaring lion"; had he not actually appeared in Eden as "a beguiling serpent"? They had also read of him as a dragon, a fox, a cockatrice, and a leviathan. They knew that the witches were in league with him, and people were alive in their midst who declared they had heard him rattling his chains in the Oak House Lane, a secluded path shaded with trees close to the village. What, however, best satisfied them as to the probability of the story was that the church had undoubtedly been carried away somehow or other. Possibly the Devil was having his revenge upon Over Church, because it was dedicated to St. Chad, the first Bishop of Lichfield; and only twenty-five years before, namely in 1303, William, Bishop of Lichfield (in whose Diocese Over then was) had been publicly defamed for having done homage to the Devil, also for kissing him on the back and often speaking to him. The villagers did not want this sort of visit again, and, learning from the monks his strong aversion to a cross, they erected one where the altar of the church had formerly stood in the middle of the village, which cross stands there to this day. Abbot Peter sent Father Simon to see the Priest at Over, to make inquiries respecting the strange occurrence. Simon told the Abbot that he was certain that he had seen something fall from the tower when it was in mid air, but he could not say what it was. At the interview, Dominus Thomas de Dutton told Simon of his own adventure, how some evil-minded person had locked him in the vestry, how he had felt the church reel and rock, then lifted with a shock from the ground, and afterwards felt it placed as gently as possible in the Swanlow Valley. He pointed out where the dead body of a man had been found on the

Gallows Loont in Swanlow, between where the church originally stood and where it was now placed. Simon saw the body, and, although terribly disfigured, at once recognised it as that of the man who had assisted the stranger guest at the Abbey to remove Ida and Elsie from their protection the previous night.

"But where's the Devil?" said Simon, who clung to his little cross.

"What Devil?" inquired the Dominus.

"Why, the Devil who carried you and the church and this man away. I saw him myself," replied Simon.

"Well, Father Simon, how could I see how it was done, or who or what did it? All I know is that a hurricane of hot wind came first, then a kind of hairy skin covered the window of the vestry and made it dark. I felt a lot more than I saw, even when I lay flat on the dry rushes on the floor. I never expected to get out alive. I thought the church would tumble to pieces every minute, and I can't make out how it is that only the crosses both inside and outside are broken as well as the crucifix over the altar. Ah! there's that one gargoyle gone against which the dead man must have fallen. Not even the altar light, which I trim every day and night, has gone out, and the great silver candlesticks with the big wax tapers are undisturbed. Has any living man ever had such a journey as mine? No, by the Holy Mary, I thank God I am here alive to tell you the little I know. Tell the Lord Abbot, I hope he won't entertain such a stranger again."

Over and over again Father Simon had to explain to the priest what he and the monks had seen, emphasising that it was the cross he carried and the prayers of the monks that had baffled the Devil and made him put the church

down. On Simon's return the Abbot recognised, as no one else did, the importance of the events which had occurred. "Was the man really dead, Simon?" inquired the Abbot.

"As dead as a stone," said Simon, "and I left him there ; no one would touch him, and the priest thought he ought to be buried, but he said he wouldn't touch him, he smelt of brimstone ; so he still lies there unknown, unburied and unhonoured."

"Not unknown. 'Requiescat in pace,' " was the simple reply of the Abbot.



CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE NUN.

“Yet among them all,
None were so formed to love and to be loved,
None to delight, adorn ; and on thee now
A curtain, blacker than the night, is dropped
For ever ! In thy gentle bosom sleep
Feelings, affections, destined now to die,
To wither like the blossom in the bud :
Those of a wife, a mother ; leaving there
A cheerless void, a chill as of the grave,
A languor and a lethargy of soul,
Death like, and gathering more and more till Death
Comes to release thee.”

SAMUEL ROGERS, the English poet who wrote the above lines, was born in 1763, and died in 1855. On his mother's side, he was connected with the two well-known Nonconformist Divines, Philip and Matthew Henry, and it was in Nonconformist circles at Stoke Newington that he was brought up. He wished to enter the Presbyterian ministry, but at his father's desire he joined a banking business in Cornhill. “He certainly had the kindest heart and unkindest tongue of anyone I ever knew,” said Fanny Kemble. The period in which he lived, his associations, domestic, personal and otherwise, afforded him no intimate knowledge of life in monastic institutions ; indeed, the lines admit a close curtain is dropped, absolutely preventing any possible acquaintance with the subject on which he

writes. And yet the poet expresses the prevailing sentiment both of yesterday and to-day, views held, however, by those who, when questioned, have no substantial basis for the ideas expressed. Is it popular Protestant prejudice or is it an intermixture of ignominious ignorance? St. Luke tells us of two sisters named Martha and Mary who, according to legendary tradition, lived together in a large house of great splendour. Christ called there and saw the two sisters. Let us, however, have the exact words of the great and learned apostle :

“ Now it came to pass, as they went, that He entered into a certain village ; and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary ; which also sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard His word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to Him and said, Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things : But one thing is needful : and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

Here we have two types of life representing divergent tendencies, attractive in different senses. It is obvious each played a correct and proper part. Each vied with the other in attending upon the Saviour ; each was anxious to serve the Lord, but in diverse ways. One is a material idea—the provision of food ; the other, a spiritual one—to sit at the Lord’s feet and feed upon the Bread of Life. Martha must have been successful in this life and industrious : it was her house. She naturally complains that besides finding a home, and possibly food, for Mary the latter does not assist on this special occasion, even by

helping to serve the Lord when additional assistance is required. An appeal is made to him for judgment. Christ has to decide, not only which is the better principle to follow, but to settle a difference between two sisters in a house, owned by one but occupied by both, and he a comparative stranger. Martha's mind is full of charitable devotion, possibly preoccupied with generous ideas of rescuing the needy, assisting the helpless, and ministering to the sick. The vocation of nurse and the call of the hospital, full of material and beneficial happiness to the body, best appealed to her. She wished to see the sweet smile of joy occasioned by the removal of material affliction, pain and suffering. She wished that the repast, to be served for her Lord, should be fitting for such a great occasion, and just as one sister will, now-a-day, say to the other, she said to Mary—"Won't you come and help me? Don't leave me to do it all." A perfectly reasonable request. Mary, however, was of a thoughtful and studious turn of mind. She set at naught the claims and realities of ordinary domestic life. These things had no charm for her. She was possessed of a cooling charity. She preferred to sit at the feet of the Master, watching every change of countenance, and listening to, or possibly dreaming of, His words of wisdom. The temperament of the two sisters was entirely different. One was fitted for the bustle of life, the other preferred to sit and think and dream of the future. Martha apparently thought of others—Mary of herself. The Lord decided that Mary was right—that she had chosen the better part. At first sight, it looks as though both Christ and Mary were influenced by selfish considerations; one wished to please by giving personal devotion and admiration,

the other seemed pleased to receive it. Our poet, Samuel Rogers, would probably not have favoured that decision. Each view will find its own supporters.

So when Ida spoke that harsh word "Duty," and decided to go back and remain with the sisters of St. Mary's Nunnery, she chose what Our Lord decided to be "the better part." It was the part she conceived was best suited to her feelings, her views and her ideas, especially when she remembered the difficulties in effecting and working out what she really and naturally would have desired.

Ida had, no doubt, an intense love for John. She had fostered and nourished it because it was a pleasure to do so. Her love was so great, and yet so honourable and true, that she was prepared to make any and every sacrifice on his account, but she would not encourage the least departure from the path of duty. Like Mary, she thought it better to serve the Lord than to wait upon John. She would remove herself from the scene, thus avoiding the temptation to do otherwise, which must certainly occur. To her mind it was impossible to "cumber herself" with the pleasures of service, even on behalf of the greatest saint that ever lived on earth, and at the same time sit quietly meditating at the feet of the Lord. Vows must not be broken. Duty must prevail. It was a terribly stern resolve. It required the force of a Nasmyth hammer to pound and pulverise the innumerable personal objections to such a course. But she was not thinking of herself; she conceived it a duty to her Lord and Master. It needed the determined love of a woman to act up to it. Will she bear the strain?

About this period in our history a book was written

entitled—"The Anceren Riwle" or Rule for Recluses. Some writers ascribe it to the twelfth century, others to the thirteenth. One of the manuscript copies found its way to St. Mary's Nunnery. It must have been exceedingly rare, for to-day there are only seven English manuscript copies of the work, two in Latin and one in French. The name of its author is doubtful. It is generally ascribed to Bishop Richard Poore, who held the see of Salisbury from 1217 to 1229, when he was translated by Pope Honorius III. to Durham. The Rule is said to have been written for the nuns who dwelt at Tarrent, in Dorsetshire. Bishop Poore was born there, and in his last sickness, in 1237, he went to Tarrent to die there. In later times the nuns living at Tarrent embraced the Cistercian rule, and Eleanor of Aquitaine, the Queen of Henry III. and the mother of Edward I., became a great benefactress of the House. It is therefore most probable that a copy of the manuscript would be at Vale Royal, and would also come under the notice of Abbot Peter. It is written in a simple, non-rhetorical style. The severity of the doctrine of self-renunciation is softened by the affectionate tone in which it is inculcated. The rules for the restraint of the senses, for confession and penance, are subordinated to the central idea of the supreme importance of purity of heart and the love of Christ. The writer says himself that the book was written for three sisters, who in the bloom of their youth had forsaken the world to become anchoresses, but he expects that it will be read by others. Portions of this manuscript were occasionally read at collation by the Lady Superior at St. Mary's, and Ida, as a novice, was much impressed by the touching and loving language used. She particularly remembered the beautiful parable set out in

the seventh part, which is entitled "Of Love," where Christ was the soul in the guise of a king. That influenced Ida more than anything else in the decision she had arrived at, and which she termed Duty. The language itself is so fine, the simile so tender and inviting, it is useless to attempt to improve upon it. In it we see the courtly attitude, which the age of romance—the civilized world was then passing through—had developed in real life, receiving a spiritual adaptation:—

"There was a lady who was besieged by her foes in an earthly castle, and her land was all destroyed, and herself quite poor. The love of a powerful King was, however, fixed upon her with such boundless affection that, to solicit her love, he sent his messengers one after the other, and often many together, and sent her trinkets many and fair, and supplies of victuals, and help of his high retinue to hold her castle. She received them all as a careless creature, with so hard a heart that he could never get nearer to her love. What wouldst thou more? He came himself at last and showed her his fair face, since he was of all men the fairest to behold, and spoke so sweetly, and with such gentle words, that they might have raised the dead from death to life. And he wrought many wonders and did many wondrous deeds before her eyes, and showed her his power, and told her of his kingdom and offered to make her queen of all that he owned. But all availed him naught. Was not this surprising mockery? For she was not worthy to have been his servant. But owing to his goodness, love so mastered him that he said at last—'Lady, thou art attacked and thine enemies are so strong that thou canst not, without my help, escape their hands; that thou mayest not be put to a shameful death, I am

prompted by love of thee to undertake this fight and rid thee of those that seek thy death. I know that I shall receive a mortal wound, but I will do it gladly to win thy heart. Now I beseech thee, for the love I bear thee, that thou love me at least after my death, since thou wouldst not in my lifetime.' Thus did the King. He freed her of her enemies and was himself wounded and slain in the end. Through a miracle he arose from death to life. Would that same lady be of an evil kind if she did not love him after this above all things? The King is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who, on this wise, wooed our souls which the devil had besieged. And He, as a noble wooer, after many messengers and many good deeds, came to prove His love, and showed by His knightly prowess that He was worthy of love, as knights were sometimes wont to do. He entered in a tournament, and as a valiant knight, had his shield pierced everywhere in the fight for His lady's love."

This part of the book further dwells upon the likeness between the shield and Christ's body. The image of His crucified form hangs suspended in the church as "after the death of a valiant knight, men hang up the deceased knight's shield high in the church, to his memory." There is more on the theme of love which is very fine. The writer then classifies the different kinds of love, and here Ida listened most attentively. The love of good friends is mentioned, but higher than that is the love between man and woman, and even higher still, that between mother and child, for the mother, to cure her child of disease, is ready to make a bath of her blood for it. Higher again is the love of the body to the soul, but the love which Christ bears to the soul surpasses them all.

Ida had told the Abbot of this reading whilst she was

recovering from her sickness, and the fright she last received when Barny de Gresford attempted to carry her away. On the other hand, nothing relieved her mind so much and gave her the peace and rest she so much needed as the news which the Abbot brought to her of the death of Gresford. He had been her ghost all the way through. He it was who got hold of her in the Abbot's rooms and bound her so tightly that she could still feel the effects. Barny had left his companion to look after Elsie de Jaeson, and which was the worse of the two conspirators it was difficult to say. She told the Abbot she should never forget it. She used to compare De Gresford's forcible modes and methods of obtaining her love with that of the persistence and tenderness of the Knight in the parable. She thought to herself that there was no force associated with true love. Such a love should be prepared to make any sacrifice consistent with the demands of duty. A forced alliance to her was equivalent to a declaration of war ; the symbol of material strength was Vulcan ; but Venus was stronger, and Christ was stronger than both.

The evening before she was to return home to her mother's at Dutton, with a view of going thence to St. Mary's, was a most trying one. The Abbot entered his parlour, where Ida was resting. He, who should have been full of joy at her persistent determination to live and work for Christ, was heavy and downcast. He failed to see that the natural love for him was only superseded by the higher love of the Son of Mary ; he only made it more difficult for Ida to perform her duty. So in the quiet solitude of his own parlour, he, the strong man, whom the tenants of Dernhall thought stern and severe, went to seek guidance and assistance from Ida—a mere woman.

"Well, Ida," he began, "now that I have saved you twice from De Gresford, you are going to leave me for ever."

"Oh, no, Father John," was the reply, "it is only for a short time, and, for me, the shorter it is the sweeter it will be. I shall always carry with me the remembrance of your kindness, which I can never—never repay."

"Ida," he replied, "memory is sweet, but it is in the past, just as the mysteries of the millennium are in the future. For me, I prefer the sweet music of the present."

"Ah, Father John," she said, trying to turn the subject, which was so painful to her, "your words just remind me of one little favour I wish you to grant, and to me it will be sweet music of the present."

"Yes, Ida, what is that?" said the Abbot.

"Oh, but you must promise first that you will do it," she said playfully.

"Very well, Ida, if I can do it, I will."

"Well, you know more about this Abbey than any other person now alive. I want you to write me a full and correct history of the Abbey."

"If I promise that, will you promise to come to the official ceremony connected with the opening?"

"Oh, but you made that promise without any condition, and I know Father John will keep his word. He always does."

"Well, well, Ida, I suppose I must; but you would remember the ceremony ever so much better if you were to be present and see it yourself."

"Yes," said Ida, "but then, quoting your own words, I should only have the pleasures of memory. I want an account of it all, written in your own handwriting and in

your own beautiful style and language. Besides, I want a history of the Abbey from the very beginning and of the work of the four Abbots who have preceded you. Write it not only for me to read, but so that those who live five or six hundred years hence will know all about this magnificent building and the cause you are helping to carry on."

"Ida," said the Abbot, "you are giving me no small task, for the information is meagre, and I doubt if all the facts and details are correctly chronicled anywhere, as they ought to be."

"Well then, John, if they ought to be, you must see that they are; perhaps my making this valuable suggestion to you may ensure that I am not altogether forgotten."

"And you?" said the Abbot.

"Well, what about me, John?"

"What are you going to do?"

"John—John—Ida Godman is going to do what she ought to do—her duty. If that wants defining more clearly, I am going to live with your picture before me, just the same as I always have done. You are to remain Abbot of Vale Royal, and I shall be a poor working sister at St. Mary's; the curtain to be drawn between us will never be a black one, and it won't always remain down. I wish you to be present when I take my consecration vow. I want you to love me every day, and to help me when I am trying to carry on the good work to which, by that vow, my life will be dedicated. I shall need the love of the Saviour more than yours to help me. Do your part, John—dear John; Ida will try with God's help to do her's. You are a man of God; De Gresford was a beast of the earth; I must be a simple, single daisy flower, growing by myself in the garden of God."

She came over to him almost heart-broken, but striving nobly not to show it, and she gave him a kiss on the forehead—the last she ever thought to give.

He brought out a little tiny parcel, wrapped in a small piece of coarse white linen, and took from it a gold ring, and, placing it on the third finger of her left hand, whispered: “Ida, I am quite reconciled ; when you are wedded to Christ, wear that for ever in remembrance of a heavenly and an earthly love; you have chosen the better part, which shall not be taken from you.”

She rushed away. She was gone, leaving the Abbot a stronger, braver, and a nobler man.

Such is the power of a woman’s truest love.



CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MINSTRELS AT DUTTON HALL.

“The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils.”

—*Shakespeare.*

THE following day sees Ida and her mother, each seated on a pillion, attended by Robert de Whitegate, the Abbey porter, and James de Bryn his assistant. They ride down the Abbey avenue, Ida not venturing to cast a glance behind for fear of breaking down, if she turned to look at the Abbey and the Abbey Church she loved so much. She thought of her last walk up the same road to witness the Abbot's ~~consecration and~~ Benediction. That was gone and past. She wondered if she would ever again see “The King's Vale Royal,” with all its beauty and holiness, so she whispered to herself a sweet good-bye to everything. “Oh, yes,” she thought, “I shall come again some day—return, but not to see the trees and the woods, or hear the warblings of the birds, but just to lie there for ever and ever.”

On they went, through the village of Wareham, now known as Weaverham, then across the ford of the Weaver at Acton, until they reached “home” at Dutton. It had

been arranged that they should rest there the night before journeying to Chester the following day. Her father, brother, and sisters were delighted to see her and her mother, and long and loving were the greetings which were showered upon both.

It was, as we should say, a small cottage of wattles and clay, with here and there a timber or two to keep it together, with a covering of straw thatch beautifully cut and tidy. Inside there was one living room, with the customary hole in the roof to let out the smoke from the fire, which, at that time, was in the centre of the room. Beyond the living room was a single bedroom, with one unglazed window, but with an oiled linen cloth to admit a feeble semblance of light and to keep out the rain. The only light by night was the smouldering fire. Why should one burn even a rushlight when there are no printed books or newspapers to read, and Caxton not even born !

Some distance away on the right could be seen Dutton Hall, the residence of Sir Peter de Dutton, who, like his predecessors, exercised a curious jurisdiction over the minstrels and other vagrants of Cheshire, granted by the Constable of Cheshire to Hugh de Dutton about the end of the reign of King John. It arose in this way :—Randle, the third Norman Earl of Chester, amongst the many conflicts he had, was distressed by the Welsh and forced to retreat to the Castle of Rothbent (Rhuddlan) in Flintshire, where they besieged him. He presently sent to his Constable of Chester, Roger Lacy, surnamed Hell, for his fierce spirit, that he would come with all speed and bring what forces he could to his relief. Roger, having gathered a tumultuous rout of fiddlers, cobblers and players, both

men and women, of the city of Chester (for it was then the midsummer fair time in the city), marched immediately towards the Earl. The Welsh, perceiving a great multitude coming, making an enormous noise, raised the siege and fled. The Earl thereupon gave his Constable the control of the fiddlers, shoemakers and others, which right, so far as the fiddlers, minstrels and vagrants are concerned, he transferred to his steward, Hugh de Dutton, and his heirs. The custom gradually became one of licensing the musicians of the county, for which purpose the family representative annually held a court at Chester, in state, on St. John the Baptist's Day, 24th June, when the suitors rendered four bottles of wine and a lance, and each minstrel had to pay $4\frac{1}{2}$ d. for the renewal of his licence. The proceedings of the court always concluded with the proclamation "God bless the King and the Heir of Dutton." This privilege is still supposed to be vested in the heir-general of the Duttons. Minstrelsy was therefore encouraged at Dutton Hall, and the afternoon and evening Ida and her mother arrived had been fixed for a great entertainment at the Hall, at which the Godmans, as also all other tenants on the estate, were expected to be present. Little did Ida anticipate such a change; however, she was obliged to go, and the trouble which Sir Peter had taken on her behalf, and his kindness to her, required some respect to his wishes. The porter from Vale Royal and his assistant were invited to accompany them.

Dutton Hall was a fine black and white timbered mansion, built somewhat after the shape of the letter D, so that the front of the house, like the front of the letter D, presented an appearance of magnitude and size. In addition, such an arrangement permitted the formation of

a large courtyard in the interior, with windows or loop-holes viewing or looking over it from innumerable points. Round the exterior of the mansion was a broad fosse, or ditch, which could readily be converted into a moat by filling it with water from a brook which ultimately found its way into the Weaver. Crossing the fosse was a long but narrow drawbridge, with portcullis of stonework of great thickness and strength, yet so framed and marked as to harmonise with the exterior of the Hall. The approach to the drawbridge was by concealed roads, having the appearance of a descent into the woods and the forests of the district. A large number of tenants and retainers had weekly duties in guarding the bridge, and were trained in the use of the bow and arrow from its battlements and loop-holes.

Assembled in the courtyard there was an immense number of people from different parts of the estate, which consisted of 37,000 acres, 1,000 messuages, 1,000 gardens, eight salt mines, six mills, three dove cotes, each holding several thousands of birds, etc. It was the largest estate in Cheshire. The occasion was the celebration of the conclusion of the harvest. It was a motley mixed crowd. Knights and their attendant squires in armour were being joked and jockeyed by jesters panoplied in various coloured silks and cloths, proud of their caps and jingling bells; grave looking men with long white flowing beards, carrying harps, which if it had been a later period in our history would have been assumed to have crossed the Welsh border. Some were making great and inharmonious sounds with cornets, shaubins, flutes, horns and pipes of various kinds; others with dried cornstalks, like Pan's pipe, such as were used by the shepherd boys. There were also Dutch

pipes to assist those who chose to dance either love dances, springs or rayes. At the west end of the courtyard, on a raised platform, were stationed the trumpeters and players on the clarion, jugglers, magicians and tregetours. These latter were the immediate successors of the Anglo-Saxon harpers and gleemen, the Norman rhymers of the Scandinavian scalds, who were soon after the Conquest called minstrels. Some of these composed their own songs, or pretended to do so, like the troubadours, who were originally natives from the south of France, and who travelled from castle to castle singing and making love. Some of these were also playing upon the pretended *vielle* or *violl*. The proper name, however, was the *rote*, an instrument with an internal wheel or cylinder, turned by a winch, like the modern hurdy-gurdy, which caused the *bourdon*, whilst the performer stopped the notes on the strings with his fingers. The *vielle* was the classic instrument of the minstrel; it required delicate manipulation and the exercise of much skill. In addition there were tumblers, rope-dancers and acrobats, some with apes and monkeys and some without. Nor must the mummers be omitted, for although these are mostly associated with Christmas, Sir Peter decided they should come to make the scene a thoroughly lively Cheshire representation of pastimes and gaiety. The mummers were disguised as bears, unicorns, lions, stags, etc., and all were carrying trays with small presents for each of the guests.

Sir Peter and Lady de Dutton, together with their specially invited house guests, were enjoying all the fun and revelry from the innumerable windows overlooking the courtyard, all of which were as wide open as their structure would admit. Showers of wild flowers, gathered

from the park and the woods, were thrown down in profusion, only to be picked up with a laugh and a scream, and returned mostly to Sir Peter's lap, with a "God bless you, Sir Peter."

Ida gently and gracefully moved about with her mother amongst the motley crowd, leaving her father and the other children to enjoy the rougher romp and play. Some are born wise, some otherwise. "Mother," she said, "it's such a change; I can scarce believe where I am. What a different world it is to St. Mary's and Vale Royal! This only makes me love the more the quiet of both places and the old home at Overton."

"Ida," she replied, "I knew you wouldn't care for it, but, after all, it's perhaps as well to see both sides of life. The world couldn't well do without either. We are obliged to have the material as well as the spiritual armour. We are obliged to have Marthas as well as Marys; at any rate until the millennium comes."

"Yes, mother, that's quite true," Ida said; "but these people wouldn't be happy at St. Mary's, and if they came, I really think Dame Marie would die with fright."

Just then, up came a skipping jester, and, seeing Ida, threw his coloured bladder right in her face. She drew back, but he jokingly offered pardon, and wanted to solace her with a kiss, which of course she disdainfully resented.

"Prythee, miss," he said, "everything is excusable here to-day; we are only reviving the old Cheshire custom, when gentlemen kissed each pretty maid."

"Well, sir, you can try your customs elsewhere and on someone else," she replied.

Sir Peter was now by her side. He had seen from above what had occurred, so brushing on one side the rude jester,

asked Ida and her mother to come up above, where she could witness the show without fear of disturbance. This was an immense relief, as he led the way up the old-fashioned oak staircase, placing two chairs for them near to himself and his lady. Addressing his wife, he said : " This is Ida and her mother, of whom you have heard so much." Lady Dutton gave them both a hearty welcome, assuring Ida of her great interest in her welfare.

Numerous were the inquiries as to what had occurred since he last saw her. Sir Peter learned with surprise of the visit by the stranger to Vale Royal and the improper use made of his name. He expressed his pleasure at the fate which had befallen De Gresford, adding that he richly deserved it and a lot more. " Perhaps he is getting it hot. What is going to happen now, Daisy Flower?" he whispered.

" Oh, I am going back to St. Mary's on the morrow," she answered.

" As a novice?" he said.

" Yes," she replied, " and then I look forward to being received as a sister."

" Well, give my kind remembrances to Dame Marie. I shall not readily forget the trouble we gave her, when we landed you safely there; but how are you journeying thither?"

So Ida explained that the porter and his assistant were accompanying them and then would return to Vale Royal.

" Nonsense, Ida," he said; " send them back at once. My own steward and one of my men shall take you both safely, and if it were necessary I would go with you. Dame Dutton, couldn't you and I go over there to pay our respects to our former neighbour and friend Dame Marie, and so take Ida back to St. Mary's?"

The Dame readily assented, and it was arranged they should have the horses at the Godmans' house by seven the following morning. "But what about Father John?" she said. "Is he left in charge of the Abbey?"

"Oh, yes," Ida replied, very quietly.

"And don't you think he will miss the Daisy Flower?"

"Perhaps he may," said Ida; "but there are thousands of daisies in the park and woods of Vale Royal; surely he won't miss one."

"Ah, Ida," said Lady Dutton, "it is just the one which he has fostered and nourished and cared for—I feel sure you are the only real one too. Even an Abbot, with all his vows, is only a bit of human nature. If you take the veil, we most likely shall never see you again, and he won't either. Do you think the Daisy will continue to grow and live without the sight of a Cheshire Sun?"

"Well, my Lady," replied Ida with great hesitation, "we have each our part to play. I could not love him half so much, loved I not duty more. I know it seems hard—no one feels it more than I do, but it can't be for long; it can't be for ever."

Coming along the passage behind the guests was one of the troubadours playing a sweet gentle air on his guitar; his fine tenor voice sang pensively, yet sadly, as though addressing another Daisy a thousand miles away. All the windows were closed to shut out the noise of the crowd below, so that not a single word should be missed. There was complete silence as his voice gradually and pathetically rose and fell, emphasising with complete modulation the different and varying expressions of the words of the song:—

“Over the mountains
And over the waves,
Under the fountains
And under the graves,
Under floods that are deepest
Which Neptune obey,
Over rocks that are steepest,
Love will find out the way.

Where there is no place
For the glow worm to lie,
Where there is no space
For a sweet butterfly,
Where the midge dares not venter
Lest herself fast she lay,
If Love come, he will enter,
And soon find out the way.

You may esteem him
A child for his might,
Or you may deem him
A coward from his flight ;
But if she whom Love doth honour
Be concealed from the day,
Set a thousand guards upon her--
Love will find out the way.

Some think to lose him
By having him confined,
And some do suppose him,
Poor thing, to be blind ;
But if ne'er so close ye wall him,
Do the best that ye may,
Blind Love, if so ye call him,
Will find out his way.

You may train the eagle
To stoop to your fist,
Or you may inveigle
The Phoenix of the East ;
The lioness, you may move her
To give o'er her prey,
But you'll ne'er find a lover
Who can't find out the way.”

Speech is said to be silvern, silence is golden. And here was silence. Ida, with tears in her eyes, begged leave to retire with her mother, and Sir Peter and Lady Dutton accepted the excuse, and assured both of them of their continued interest in their welfare.



CHAPTER XXX.

IDA'S RETURN TO ST. MARY'S NUNNERY.

"There's not a joy the world can give
Like that it takes away."

—*Byron.*

SIR PETER and Lady Dutton were at the Godmans' cottage punctually at seven the next morning, riding pillion. Ida, and all the family, had been up since five, for she wished to have a look at the little home, and enjoy a stroll in the fields feeding the cattle, and drink in the last big draught of fresh country air. It was as though it were to be the final glimpse of the best side of bucolic nature mixed with a wild youthful scramble through the autumn-tinted bracken. The wild huzzas of the younger children filled her with delight. There was a freedom, a liberty, an absence of restraint she could never hope to enjoy again; and to leave it all for a black gown, a demure look and a confined space! True, the same sun would shine, but the golden beams would not penetrate thick walls or obscure glass. Quite true, the silver polished moon would continue to send out its cold nocturnal rays, but they would fall mostly on the dead roof rather than the religious life within. She pondered, and thought that Christ could be without, quite as much as within the temple. She skipped along the soft silver sand, so pleased to revel barefooted in its tiny yielding particles. Sandals

and shoes were converted into battledores and wild flowers were flying like a thousand shuttlecocks. All this was followed by a delightful roll, sweeping away all the little hillocks and dales their festive nature and juvenile skill had built. Suddenly she would stop and think of the hard path of duty. In the midst of all these natural gambols and frolics, her mother calls out to remind her that the horses are ready and waiting. Another final look, another whiff of country air, another hard parting. Duty is a stern master! She has to mount behind one of Sir Peter's esquires, who, somewhat unceremoniously, seems to buckle her tighter than is necessary, just to remind her of the restraint that is to come. Her mother is similarly placed. "Good-bye, good-bye," is hardest when it is good-bye for ever and ever. Yet it is the natural termination of each and every life. What wonder if there were some tears again? But she is brave, as everyone must be who has to face the battle of life.

The little cavalcade journeys through Sutton, Frodsham, Helsby, and on to Chester, passing on their way through the dear little village of Overton, where real daisy flowers grew, and every inch of ground brought back delightful and pleasant memories. Sir Peter reminded her this was the road they traversed so very early, some time ago, when she made her first acquaintance with St. Mary's Nunnery. The thought of such a journey made her shiver, but it served to revive her gratitude to the House which gave her a welcome under most distressing and trying conditions. It was about noon when they arrived in the city, for the roads then were mere beaten tracks, often foundrous, and certainly not nearly so inviting as the green grass over the hedgerows. Some dinner was obtained at the Green

Dragon, where the horses were stalled and baited. Sir Peter indulged somewhat freely in the celebrated ales of the hostelry, the strength of which was somewhat proved by his subsequent rollicking mood. He and Lady Dutton then accompanied Ida to the Nunnery. There was old Mike, the porter, at the gate, with whom Sir Peter had a friendly joke accompanied by more than a friendly tip, which made Mike more friendly than ever. Even he seemed to welcome Ida's return, and congratulated her on her good colour, adding by way of compliment:—"By St. Mary, you'd a'most beat some of our best red poppies." Yes, that morning ramble and ride had been a most wonderful painter.

They were all ushered into Dame Marie's parlour, passing on their way Hilda and Joan, who, as far as nunnery nymphs were allowed, seemed brimming over with secular smiles.

"A deuce of a sweet face that," said Sir Peter.

"Oh, Peter, that's not a remark to make here," said his lady.

"Well, well, a man's bound to say what he feels," was the reply; "besides, where else should I say it? Ain't a smile better than a sour speech?"

"Yes, yes, Peter; but both are out of place here."

"Now, Dame, if that be true thou'rt a bigger sinner than me."

"How, Sir Peter Dutton?"

"Well, I smiled, which you say is wrong, but you made a sour speech, which is wronger." Sir Peter laughed at his own wit and the Dame sat demure.

After waiting some few minutes in my Lady's parlour, the door was opened by one of the sisters, and Dame

Marie was ushered in, looking very sedate in her black habit.

"Well, Sir Peter, you have brought your good lady to see me, and this truant Ida."

"Yes, my Lady, this is Dame Dutton; and I think I'd better tell you that that is Ida Godman, otherwise you won't know her, she looks so much better and brighter since you were kind enough to take her in. There is her mother, too, my Lady," he added.

Congratulations passed all round, but there was an air of restraint about Dame Marie's words which even Sir Peter's good nature could scarcely soften. At last she addressed Ida.

"I wonder you have not written yourself to tell me of the delay in your return and to explain the cause."

"Oh, my Lady, Father John—I mean the Lord Abbot—said that he would write and send word by one of his own messengers why I could not possibly return."

"Well, yes, I had a letter or two from the Abbot; but I fail to understand—even now—why you should have been detained at the Abbey for so many weeks. To me it is more than a puzzle how you came to stay there at all, for the Cistercian rules are so very rigorous and strict."

Sir Peter, in the mildest and most winning terms, had to explain the extraordinary circumstances connected with Ida's illness and detention at Vale Royal.

"Yes, yes; but after all, if I had been ill myself, I shouldn't have been allowed to stay," she said. Then Sir Peter put his foot into it.

"Possibly not—possibly not, my Lady;" and then, remembering himself, he added: "Oh! but your Ladyship does not know what an extraordinary man Abbot

Peter is. I admit the circumstances were exceptional, but the best plan, my Lady, is to try it yourself."

"What, Sir Peter! Try to let someone attempt to run away with me! Never."

"Ah! my Lady, I am sure they wouldn't do that—but never mind, I say, try it."

"Well," turning to Lady Dutton, "I don't know your views, but the Abbot does not seem the only extraordinary man in that part of the country."

"Well, my Lady, all I can say is—Try it, try it," for Sir Peter's fluency of speech seemed to have deserted him.

Determined to have another shot at him," she said: "But, Sir Peter, how can I try it?"

"Well, my Lady, there you ask me a deuced awkward question. By St. Mary, I don't know how it's done; but try it, my Lady, try it."

"Sir Peter, Sir Peter"—with another rub—"I know I shouldn't be sufficiently attractive for the devil or any of his followers to attempt to run away with me."

"May be not, my Lady, may be not, but try it—their's my words." And he hung his head down somewhat mischievously. "I shouldn't do it myself, but there is no accounting for tastes."

Ida and her mother, as well as Lady Dutton, sat supremely sedate, still and silent, which in itself was a most difficult trial.

Making no headway with Sir Peter, Dame Marie turned to Ida's mother, and said: "Well, Mrs. Godman, I can only ask you, as her mother, if you are quite satisfied with all that has occurred whilst Ida has been away from St. Mary's; and as to her future, will she be reconciled

to our strict rules, which scarce admit of any breach, even in case of sickness?"

"My Lady," was her mother's reply, "I know Ida so well and trust her so much, that I can assure you she would never sanction any wrong to herself or to others. She has always looked forward to returning to her work here, and has repeatedly expressed her gratitude to you for your kind and excellent advice and assistance. Indeed, if you had not come forward in her distress, she would have been captured and I should have lost her for ever."

Somewhat mollified, the Dame remarked: "That is very kind of you, Mrs. Godman. I suppose we must think the circumstances are exceptional, and now that De Gresford is dead and buried, I presume no further events of that character can occur, and that Ida will benefit by the trying experience she has had. By the bye, if you should see the Lord Abbot, you might convey my respects to him and tell him that when he is next in Chester attending the Palatine Parliament, I shall be pleased to see him and hear from him personally the full details of these remarkable occurrences."

"Yes, try it, my Lady, try it," rang out Sir Peter.

"As for your advice, Sir Peter, I shall *not* try it, and if I had not known you in years gone by—alas! never to return—I should be somewhat offended; but as it is, for the sake of those good old times, when we were children together, I forgive and forget."

"Oh, my Lady," he said, "I forgive, but, you know, I can't forget the happiness you gave me on several occasions, just as you say, when we were children together. Try it again, my Lady, try it again."

Even my Lady blushed and smiled.

"Children together!" The phrase is full of happy, joyful memories: an innocence which does not repeat itself, a bliss unknown in after life! How the playful frolics and gambols of budding life are recalled, all unrestrained, except by a mother's look! It pictures the hills we climbed together, the very daisies and buttercups we gathered, and the chains of wild flowers we threaded, as sweet as the wild kisses we gave, all without a thought of the disturbances and difficulties of the outside world. How soon the picture dissolves and fades away, only to be remembered as part of the distant—far distant—past! Such thoughts as those were passing through Dame Marie's mind, which even the severity of a nun's garb could not obliterate or obscure. All gone—never to return!

Sir Peter and Lady de Dutton, with Ida's mother, had to return home during the daylight, so as to avoid the dangers of the country lanes at night. It was a terrible good-bye to Ida and to all of them. However, accompanied by Sister Hilda (who never forgot the wonderful dream she had told to Joan), Ida was permitted to return with the party to the famous Chester hostelry where the horses had been stabled. Sir Peter was apparently in a somewhat jocose mood, but the real fact was, that he did not wish to leave Ida with a depressed spirit, and he had somewhat of a difficulty himself in suppressing his own distress in parting with the girl in whom he had showed such a deep interest. So one can understand his joking with Sister Hilda, who, whilst walking along the Bridge Street Row, frequented by so many people, had to preserve the severe attitude of reserve which the rules of St. Benedict prescribed.

"Sister Hilda Kyle," Sir Peter said, "I am going to entrust this tiny daisy flower to your special care; see that she gets plenty of sleep and sunlight, and then I don't mind."

"Yes," said Ida's mother, "and don't let her mope too much over those Missals and Breviaries. She is very fond of nursing and helping the poor and the sick; can't she have some of those duties put in her way, so as to get out in the fresh air now and then?"

"Yes," replied Hilda, "the great strain will be during her life as a novice. You know the hard work in all our city hospitals falls upon those who are in training for the first year or two; after that, when she is a sister like myself, the work will not be so difficult, but there will be greater responsibility. But see, I have gone through it all; perhaps it is my Scotch descent which helps me through all my troubles. I will, however, do my best for Ida, and if I can, on the quiet, do some of her work for her. I shall do so," giving Ida a squeeze of the hand which meant more than the pretty little speech.

"Oh," said Sir Peter, "are you Scotch? By King Edward, it seems as though His Majesty would have a big mouthful in subduing your countrymen and restoring order and peace there."

"Yes," said Hilda, "I came, as my real name indicates, from the famous Kyles of Bute—the most beautiful place in the whole world. My father was Scotch; he married an Englishwoman from the North, and then they travelled down to Chester to find trade at the port, but unfortunately both died when I was about nineteen, and the sisters of St. Mary took me in, and now I love the place. Our life here is full of happiness under the Dame Marie. Some

people think it severe; so it is against everything that is wrong. We are taught to love—but such love as we have must all be given to the Saviour of the world and the Holy Mother. When we have learned that lesson, we can be trusted to show our love of the world by practice and example; we can visit and relieve the sick and poor, and soon they learn to love Christ and the Maiden Mother in the same way that we do.”

“Ah, well,” said Sir Peter, “you must both come right away to Dutton Hall whenever the Dame permits, and there you will see something which beats your Kyles of Bute and this city. By the Holy Mary, I wouldn’t live anywhere but at Dutton, with its game, foxes and fat deer. They never are poor, but sometimes they be sick after a good day’s sport; I am sure they enjoy it quite as much as I do, and the risk I run of broken bones is nearly as great as theirs. So both of you come, and, Hilda, you can see what Cheshire men are made of when at their best.”

Tally-ho and away!

On their return to the Nunnery, Hilda took hold of Ida’s arm, gently placing one hand in her own, until the last tear had dried away. Fortunately Sister Joan was the first Mistress of the Novices whom Ida was placed under, and although she had no power to dispense with the necessary reading, training or work, she could and did combine kindness with discipline, and any relaxation suggested by her to the Lady Superior met, as a rule, with a generous approval.

The day at the Convent was divided into the canonical hours, being stated times fixed by ecclesiastical law for prayer and devotion. These were seven in number, namely, Mattins, Prime, Tierce, Sext, None, Vespers or

Evensong, and Compline. During winter, a night office was said in church at the eighth hour—that is, at two o'clock in the morning, when the *matutinæ laudes* (morning praises) were sung, but the time for that was variable. Between Easter and winter, however, the rule says:—"That the nuns shall unto Mattins rise, when the day begins to dawn, that they their letters may well know." Mattins were followed by a period of rest, probably until five o'clock, when the nuns rose and assembled in the choir to celebrate the office of Prime. This was followed by the business of the convent, always transacted in the Chapter House, afterwards by a meal, and then by work. Children attending St. Mary's for educational purposes were taught between Prime and Tierce.

At Tierce a short chapter Mass was sung, followed by continued study:—"From Tierce to Sext the nuns shall read lessons." At eight in the morning the nuns assembled in the choir for the celebration of High Mass, the principal service of the day, after which came the chief meal. This was served in the refectory, during which a short reading was given by the legister, or reader at meals. She had to read distinctly and openly so that all might understand. The time of the meal was movable. In summer the nuns were to eat at Sext, but on Wednesdays and Fridays were to fast till Nones, that is noon, except "they sink and sweat in hay or corn with travail great," when the time might be altered at the will of the Superior. This is mentioned to show that secular duties were recognised, and that life in the convent was not that of the recluse or anchoress as generally imagined. Between December and Lent they always ate at Nones. About three o'clock—

Vespers, that is evensong—the inmates once more assembled in church. The celebration of evensong partook of the solemnity of the celebration of High Mass. After Vespers came supper, and then “the nuns could sit where they would and read lessons of Holy Writ, or else the lives of holy men and women,” until the tolling of the bell summoned them to the Chapter House, where they joined their Superior. Compline concluded the religious exercises of the day. After this the nuns retired to the dormitory, where unbroken silence was to be observed. Inside the dormitory, curtains were hung so as to separate bed from bed.

The Lady Superior had the principal meal with the sisters; she sat at a high table whilst the sisters sat at side tables, with the novices at a lower table. When they had done, the sisters wiped their knives and spoons on their napkins; they were to guard against spotting the cloth and spilling the food, and were directed to put away their cups and spoons “honest and clean” into the “coffyns,” which were kept underneath the table. At the end of a meal, the sisters swept the crumbs up with their napkins, and then, at a sign from the Lady Superior, they bore the surplus food away to the serving-house. The youngest sister took the first dish and each one carried away something according to age. The language in which the utensils are described presents some difficulties. They took away the drink and then “the garnapes that they sette on, ther pots and cruses, after thys, brede, hole, kytte, cantelles and crommes and last of alle salt.”

Inasmuch as the founder of the Convent, Randulf Gernons, Earl of Chester, had, in or about the year 1150, granted to them “one boat in the water of Chester to fish

where they will with any net," we may conclude that salmon and freshwater fish often formed part of the diet. Goods and dried fruit were also continually being brought from Ireland and abroad to the port of Chester, whilst all around the city were pastoral and agricultural lands which could not be surpassed anywhere in the country.

Of the spiritual food at the convent one example has already been given from the Nun's Rule. Another similarly beautiful illustration will serve to show that the religious instruction was much more adapted to convey the true meaning to the young, than the dry creeds and doctrines with which religion is too intimately associated in these later days. It is entitled, "A luvē ron"—that is a love song—and was written by Thomas de Hales for the use of a nun. An exquisitely illuminated manuscript copy of this song was sent by Abbot Peter to Ida to place in the convent library. Her joy knew no bounds on receiving such a present. Hales was a native of Hales in Gloucestershire, had studied both at Oxford and Paris, and was under the influence of the Franciscan movement. Moreover, the village of Hales became the seat of a Cistercian monastery founded by the brother of Henry III., and uncle of King Edward I., Richard Earl of Cornwall. The year 1250 is accepted as the date when Hales flourished, but his English poem was probably written somewhat earlier. This is suggested by the praise bestowed upon it in "King Henry III. and his Wealth"—which could hardly have been accorded later than 1240.

Falling in with the tendencies of the age, it treats of the happiness in store for women who accept Christ as their spouse. Thomas de Hales tells how he came to advise a nun in her choice of a lover. As the translation of the

poem into modern English rhyme sacrifices much of its directness, the stanzas which follow have been rendered as prose.

A maid of Christ bade me earnestly to make her a love song,
That she might best learn how to take a faithful lover,
Most faithful of all and most suited to a free woman.
I will not refuse her, but direct her as best I can.

Maiden, thou must understand that this world's love is rare,
In many ways fickle, worthless, weak, deceiving.
Men that are bold here, pass away as the winds blow ;
Under the earth they lie cold, fallen away as meadow grass.

No one enters life who is certain to remain,
For here man has many sorrows, neither repose nor rest ;
Towards his end he hastens, abiding but a short time,
Pain and death hurry him away, when most he clings to life.

None is so rich nor yet so free but he soon must go ;
Gold and silver, pomp and ermine give him no surety ;
Swift though he be, he cannot escape nor lengthen his life a day,
Thus, thou seest, this world as a shadow glides past.

The poet Hales then enlarges on the transitional nature of terrestrial love. Where are Paris and Helen, Amadis, Tristram, and others famous for their love? Wealth such as King Henry's, beauty such as Absalom's, availed them naught. But the poet knows of a true King whose love abides.

Ah, sweet, if thou knewest but this one's virtues !
He is fair and bright, of glad cheer, mild of mood,
Lovely through joy, true of trust, free of heart, full of wisdom ;
Never wouldst thou regret it, if once thou wert given into his care.

He is the richest man in the land as far as men have the power
of speech,

All is given into his hand, east, west, north and south :

Henry the King holds of him and bows to him.

Maiden, to thee he sends a message that he would be beloved by
thee.

The beauty of this lover—Christ—is then described, and the fairness of his dwelling, where hate, pride and envy

enter not, and where all rejoice with the angels. "Are not those in a good way who love such a Lord?" the poet asks. In return for the bliss Christ grants, He asks only that the maiden keep bright the jewel of maidenhood which He has entrusted to her. The poem ends thus:—

This poem, maiden, I send thee open and without a seal,
Bidding thee unroll it and learn each part by heart,
Then be very gracious and teach it to other maidens;
Who knows the whole right well will be comforted by it.

If ever thou sittest lonely, draw forth this little writing,
Sing it with sweet tones, and do as I bid thee.
He who has sent thee a greeting, God Almighty be with thee,
And receive thee in His bower, high up in heaven, where He sits.
And may he have good ending, who has written this little song.

It was Ida's pride to be able to recite the whole of this beautiful poem without a single mistake or any hesitation. She used to call it "John's love song." No manuscript was ever more treasured or used; it was a message of peace and reconciliation; it was the triumph of the true love of a true woman, and the powerful prelate had bowed the knee to the advice she had given and the course she had, with great difficulty and pain, adopted. She was now convinced that Abbot Peter, whom, as a man, she loved above all other men, was quite satisfied that she had chosen the "better part," and this knowledge was a solace to her as the weeks and months slipped quietly by. When the spring and the summer months came round once more, she wandered in the large Nunnery garden overlooking the River Dee. There she remembered with English pride that the ancient Briton had paddled his tiny coracle; the Roman centurion bathed in its waters; and King Edgar had been honoured with the homage of his vassals. She knew that only a few years ago the Mayor of the city had,

at the request of Edward II., to supply two ships of war, fully equipped with men, arms and provisions, for His Majesty's Scottish expedition. From the garden she could then see the ships coming to the port from Ireland and abroad, stored with goods for consumption and use in the city and elsewhere. There was a good harbour to which



ARMS OF THE GOODMAN FAMILY.

[Taken from King's "Vale Royal." First Edition, published 1656.]

many traders both of Chester and other parts of England resorted with their ships, to the great profit of the inhabitants. There was a crowded concourse of foreign traders landing direct at the Watergate, only a few hundred yards from the Nunnery garden wall. Alas, alas! the sea, a century or two later, receded, and the port was ruined by

silting up so that no merchant ships could approach within twelve miles or more. So we, in the twentieth century, know in truth and in verse of "The Sands of Dee," and only learn from history of her ships. Such a change Ida did not live to see, or the election of Richard Godeman as Mayor of Chester in 1498, William Godemon in 1532 and again in 1536, Ralph Godemon in 1547, and William Goodman in 1579. These namesakes were illustrious successors to the family with which Ida was so intimately associated. In the high office they held, they were proud to acknowledge Ida as one of their distinguished ancestors.



CHAPTER XXXI.

THE CONSECRATION.

"In peace, Love tunes the shepherd's reed ;
In war, he mounts the warrior's steed ;
In halls, in gay attire is seen ;
In hamlets, dances on the green.
Love rules the Court, the camp, the grove,
And men below, and saints above ;
For love is heaven, and heaven is love."

—*Sir W. Scott*—" *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*."

THE time was now coming round when Ida must take another step forward—an irrevocable step. Up to the present she was at liberty to withdraw from the convent, to retire from a religious life and to rejoin the world. Would she take the veil, subscribe the roll, and wear the ring, belong to Christ for ever and ever ? On three occasions, with considerable intervals of time, she had been solemnly asked by the Lady Superior if she still persisted in her request to be admitted a nun, to join the religious community. Her answers were always decisive, firm, and without hesitation. One day Dame Marie said to her : "Ida, the time is approaching when your consecration to the Saviour and the Blessed Virgin should take place. Have you seriously considered the solemn act of forsaking the world, and accepting the Lord Jesus for ever and ever, as your sole Guide, Master, Husband and Friend ?"

"Yes, my Lady," she replied. "I have thought over it, prayed over it, and I am satisfied that all my love should

be given to Him Who died for me and to redeem the world."

"Well now, Ida," my Lady said, "the Abbot of St. Werburgh usually consecrates all nuns at St. Mary's, for we do not accept the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry; but I remember that the Lord Abbot of Vale Royal brought you here, and if you prefer that he should bless you I will make it my business to communicate with him and ask if he will do this for you."

"Oh, my Lady," Ida said, "I cannot thank you sufficiently for this kind and thoughtful suggestion. I should like to see the Lord Abbot of Vale Royal once more. No blessing will be more acceptable than his; I should wish to feel his holy hands placed upon my head, to hear him alone pronounce the curse against all those who desire to disturb my holy purpose, and that he should clothe me with the veil of righteousness and purity. Let him marry me to the Lord."

"Very well, then, Ida, I will ascertain from his Lordship when he will be attending the Parliament for the County Palatine, and he will thus save the necessity of making a special journey, which, with his enormous duties and responsibilities, must be a great consideration."

"Ah, yes, my Lady," replied Ida, "he must have a lot of work to do, but I think he would come on any of the holy days, if you only mention that it is to consecrate me. Besides, if you are writing, my Lady, and sending over a messenger, would you oblige me by asking him if he has finished something he promised to do for me?"

"Well, what is that, Ida? He has already done a lot for you; you must not trespass upon his time or his kindness."

"Yes, but, my Lady," she replied, "it is something he promised, and Father John—I mean the Lord Abbot—always keeps his promises; so you may tell him, my Lady if you will be so good, to be sure to bring it with him."

"Bring what, Ida?"

"Ah, yes, my Lady, the history of the foundation of his Abbey and the lives of the four Abbots who preceded him."

"Well, well, Ida," said my Lady, "you are very exacting; what you mention will be an enormous trouble. You can't surely expect him to do all this for you, who are not yet even a nun of St. Mary's. I couldn't even expect him to do it for me. I really don't know if I ought to mention it in my letter."

"Oh, but, my Lady," said Ida, "he will be so disappointed if he thinks I have forgotten his promise; he likes me to remember everything, and if I don't remind him he will think I have no memory and that will make him sad. I know he will look upon it as a work of love. I am sure he will. Besides, my Lady, he is so fond of history himself, I am sure that, without my request, he will do it so as to make the Abbey Leger more complete + for those who come after him."

"Very well, Ida, I will mention it as your request, not mine; you really don't know the responsibilities of such a high office. I cannot see how he can find time to write it all out." Then, thinking to herself, she added—"Of course, Ida, it will, as you say, be not only very useful to us, but if it can possibly be preserved, it will be an extremely valuable manuscript to those who live in Cheshire five or six hundred years hence, if the world lasts so long."

Ida retired to rest, full of youthful spirit and joy, which aided her in the necessary preparations associated with her act of consecration.

In two or three weeks' time the Abbey Porter from Vale Royal was seen to enter the convent gates bearing a missive for my Lady, and another for Ida. She opened her letter



COUNTER SEAL OF ABBOT OF VALE ROYAL.

[From Albert Way. See Vol. I. of "Journal of Chester Archæological Society," page 161.]

very hurriedly—it was the first letter she had received since she came to Chester. It was secured with an enormous seal taken from the ring which she had seen on the Abbot's finger. Modernised, it ran as follows:—
 "To the right loving Ida Godman of Overton and Dutton within this Palatine County of Chester, our handmaiden of

low estate, whom our Lord Jesus Christ is about to take unto Himself. Peter, Lord Abbot of Vale Royal, sends greetings with many welcomes.

“Remembering our association with you when we were at Norton Priory, and your acquiescence in our desire to perform before His Majesty the King of England (of sweet and blessed memory) the Miracle Play of the Nativity, and the numerous difficulties and dangers you encountered on our account, in connection with the same, we approach your request, that we should ourselves celebrate your act of consecration, with every desire to accede to the same, as far as time and circumstances will permit.

“We have seen you grow in wisdom, strength, and virtue; wisdom to know that which be right; strength to resist that which be wrong; and virtue which is knowledge of the Spirit of God.

“With all these great and noble qualities we fully appreciate your desire to become one of the flowers of God’s beautiful garden. Outside, the daisies grow, inside are the roses and the violets, which are the stars of the firmament. After our act of consecration you will become one of the lilies which beautify and adorn the garden of Heaven. Thus from a simple little daisy flower, trodden under the foot of man, you will be lifted up higher and higher to be a perpetual lamp in our Holy Temple. Penetrating the dark pages of history, your light shall illumine the world in years to come. Just as the splendour of the diamond is never dimmed with age, so your excellence, though concealed by the shadow of centuries, shall some day shine in all its pristine glory. Death and the grave shall not hide it. Like the sun and the moon, the memory of your good deeds shall live till time

shall be no more. You have indeed been tested and tried and found true. You have shamed and baffled the devil. The purity of your life shall be told to the civilised world. The example you have set is a picture which our poor words fail to paint.

“We therefore welcome your request that we should crown you, in the name of the Lord Jesus and the Holy Virgin, with Christ’s bridal veil. Receive and wear it in token of your reception as His spouse, and may His grace and love illumine the path of your life for ever and ever.

“You make one further request to which we gladly accede, namely, that we should write in simple form the history of our noble and glorious Abbey and the lives of our four predecessors in the high office we hold. We have been engaged on this labour of love ever since you personally spoke to us about it, and on the day of your consecration, we will hand to you, in our own handwriting, our personal account of the above matters, that the same be preserved for the benefit and use of those who, in some profane age, may have pulled to pieces our temporal building, thinking to destroy (which they cannot) the truth as it is in Jesus.

“We may not serve the Lord as others would have us, but at least we sing and magnify His name for ever and ever. Our light in this dark world seems poor and dim, but in the brighter future, in the light of history, it will be acknowledged some day, that we kept the lamp of life and truth from being extinguished.

“Yours for ever in the Lord,

“PETER.”

Ida read and re-read the letter, her face blushing with modesty and pride. Never had she received such a

learned composition before. Never did she conceive such language could be addressed to her. Yet she knew the Abbot too well to know he could ever be guilty of flattery and dissimulation.

There was something like prophecy in a few of his utterances. Was he addressing her or those to come?

Hilda and Joan had noticed her terrible interest in the paper she had been reading. At last Hilda said: "Ida, my sweet daisy flower, Joan and I hope your communication does not mean further trouble, for we know that you have had more than your share."

"Oh, no," said Ida, "if there be any trouble, it would be in the future for myself, lest my weakness permits me to fall from the high pinnacle to which the Abbot of Vale Royal seems to think I have risen. I wish he would not think so highly of me. I do not intend to be unworthy of my profession, or insincere in my respect for him, but—one never knows—Peter his namesake, far higher than I am, failed in his love. I should never forgive myself if I did. You know he gave me a ring; what would he think if ever I wished to sell it for money? He would be sure to want it back and I couldn't give it to him, and some horrid Jew, who sacrificed the Master, would probably have it. It would be rather insulting, wouldn't it, if I asked him if I might sell that ring? Oh, I do wish I could be treated like a little daisy flower, placed with a thousand others to relieve the monotony of the beautiful green grass. I should be quite content."

"Yes, yes," replied Hilda, "but daisies are not cultivated flowers; they grow free and wild.

"Just as I really want to be," chimed in Ida.

"My dear sweet, you forget your intended vow. You

are shortly to be placed in God's garden as one of its attractions and ornaments. Abbot Peter would, of course, be annoyed beyond words if you even thought of selling that keepsake of a bridal ring, but I cannot imagine Ida Godman entertaining such a low idea. It would be an insult to think of such a thing. It would be base ingratitude."

"Ah," said Ida, "that's just what Father John—I mean the Lord Abbot—told me. When he gave me this ring I told him that I should never part with the ring; but you know women are weak when they are in want. I would much rather live in the sunshine than starve in the starlight. I prefer to be a living daisy rather than a dead diamond."

"Yes," said Joan, "but one lives longer than the other, doesn't it?"

"Oh, Joan," she replied, "I never knew a diamond lived at all."

"Yes," said Joan, "but it shines because it contains the essence of the sunlight of thousands and thousands of years. You can't destroy it. You may divide it, yet each cleavage only spreads and divides the light over space."

"Ah, Joan," she answered, "a little daisy is something for the children to play with; diamonds are the sport of queens and the temptation of thieves and robbers. I love to please the little children best. Did not our Lord say, and did I not once dream, 'for of such is the Kingdom of heaven'?"

"Well," said Hilda, "if you talk and argue like that, I shall wonder if the Lord Abbot has said enough. Do let us see what he really did say."

Reluctantly poor Ida pulled from her warm breast, close

to which the ivory cross rested, the letter they wished to read, saying "You both really appear to know so much about what he says, you might as well read it all; but remember you asked for it, otherwise I am sure I shouldn't have had the spirit to have shown it to you. You will see what a lot he thinks about me, but I know I am not deserving of half he says."

How anxiously she watched their faces, as line by line was passed by; she hoped they would not be jealous; she had never known them to be so; she hung her head down with a humility which proved that there was not an atom of pride to purge away. She had no conceit, although sometimes she told the Abbot, playfully, that he was conceited. The mistake of the Abbot, however, was that he thought too much of Ida.

Hilda handed her back the letter, simply remarking: "It's all true; those are the words of a great good man, although I know you don't think so; he has done so much for you, you have begun to change and to be ungrateful. And you, Ida, whether you like it or not, will live like the diamond, when Joan and I have gone the way of all flesh. Possibly, however, the rays from the diamond may be borrowed from the lessons the great Abbot has taught you. Whether you are a black diamond or not depends upon yourself. May God help you; Joan and I will do our very best for you as long as we live."

Soon the appointed day came round. The night before she spent in solemn, silent and sacred prayer, especially praying that the meekness and simplicity of her childhood might never be taken from her; that she might never be untrue to her profession or false to any promise she had ever made.

We see her gently led by Sister Hilda to the church, robed in white, carrying the black religious habit over her right arm and an extinguished taper in her left. High Mass was reverently sung, followed by the Collect, after which the Epistle for the day was read. She laid the habit before the altar at the Lord Abbot's feet, and held the taper in her hand. The Abbot then consecrated the habit, and gave it to her, saying: "Take, Ida, the robe which you shall wear in innocence." She then retired slowly and gracefully to the Revestry, where, with Sister Hilda's assistance, she put on the habit and returned to the church with a lighted taper, singing "I love Christ into Whose bed I have entered." Then the Abbot read the Gospel and Creed, and, addressing Ida, said: "Come, daughter, I will teach you the fear of the Lord," whereupon she approached the altar singing, with tears in her eyes, "And now I follow with my whole heart." The Abbot then prostrated himself on the carpet before the altar, Ida doing the same behind him. The Litany was then sung by two clerks, the choir making the responses, the Abbot and the assistant ministers of the altar afterwards singing the seven psalms. After the Litany the Abbot rose, and began the "Veni Creator," his sweet tenor voice creating a great impression; then Ida rose and came before the altar. There it was that she nearly gave way, for the Abbot approached close up to her, seemed to look her through and through, then he, tenderly and lovingly, put the white veil upon her head as she stooped, for she was taller than he was. She was married to Christ! After this Ida sang "Induit me Dominus." Then followed the Abbot's curse against all those who presumed to disturb her holy purpose, and this was pronounced so emphatically that the devil

himself, if he had been present, would have hidden away. Ida then put on record her profession, placed the signature of the cross, made with consecrated wine, at the foot of the usual declaration in Latin, which ran as follows :—
“ I, Sister Ida Marian Godman, in accordance with the rule of St. Benedict, in this place, St. Mary's Convent, in the city of Chester, in the presence of the Reverend Father in Christ, Peter, Lord Abbot of Vale Royal, promise steadfastly continuance in virtue, and obedience before God and all His saints. I subscribe this with my own hand.” She then laid the writing upon the altar, from whence Dame Marie, as Lady Superior, took it to place it in the archives of the convent. Ida then stood before the altar, and said slowly and reverently, three times, “ Receive me, O Lord,” which was each time repeated by all present. The service then concluded with the Doxology, “ Kyrie Eleison,” and the Lord's Prayer. During this Ida lay before the altar; after which she gave the taper to Hilda to hold, and offered bread and wine to the Lord Abbot; she then again took the taper and stood inclined until she had communicated, and the Mass and the Benediction were concluded. After the Mass she offered the taper upon the altar and descended in peace. The terrible ordeal was over !

“ Married to Christ, dead to the world ;” so the world says, forgetful of the unostentatious way in which the nun's duties are performed, the sacrifice made, the kind words of encouragement and relief given to the sick and suffering, and above all the womanly grace and affection which accompanies the discharge of every act and duty. Ida's tall graceful figure, covered with the black robe and white veil, lent inspiration to the holy ceremony, based as it was upon centuries of thought and meaning.

No mercenary motive could be associated with such devotion. No display of pompous pride was visible, for the great world outside knew nothing of the light of the little world within. And yet the marriage was irrevocably registered in Heaven, and Death itself could do no more than unfold and open the gates of eternal Life, heralding the consummation of the vow so solemnly pledged.

The little chapel of St. Mary's Convent, with its beautifully decorated altar, was not the centre of an arena of doubtful faiths or doctrinal disquisitions. And yet its very simplicity severely tried the strength of a powerful Lord Abbot. See how his hand shakes; hear how his voice seems choking and confused; yet he discharges his duty nobly and faithfully. Were there no qualms of conscience, no tears of regret, no words of remonstrance? None were spoken. He was a man. She had chosen her part, and it was not for him to interfere. There was a look from each to each, when the bridal veil was put on—such a look!—a last look; it might not be for ever. There was just that crumb of comfort.

Shortly before Ida retired, he pulled from underneath his rich sacerdotal robe some strips of parchment, on which were inscribed in his own neat handwriting the memorial of his own great Abbey. In broken tones we hear him say, "Sister Ida, here is my bridal gift. It is a record of life—past life—for it tells, from the best information I have been able to obtain, in very simple language, the history of my Abbey, from its birth to this day—the date of your marriage to the blessed Christ. If it had not been for your request and my special knowledge of you, Ida, it never would have been written. Love sometimes loosens the tongue and occasionally inspires one's thoughts,

enabling us to write what otherwise would have been lost to the world. This history, therefore, is the result of my holy and tender love for you. Take these parchments, preserve and protect them as long as you live. May God bless and protect you ; guide you aright. May your life be full of happy, earnest zeal for Christ, and all His creatures. When your life here is finished, let it be ordered that this manuscript come with you to Vale Royal, to be placed in our archives. Its production shall ensure, if I be not alive, that your body be placed in front of our High Altar as a record of your holy life and of our esteem. Centuries afterwards, even when no stone may be seen of our great building, the work I now hand to you shall be once more known, and the place of your burial revered as the most holy spot amongst us. God bless you, Ida."

She took it from his hands, and placed it under the veil and robe which also hid her tears.



CHAPTER XXXII.

THE MANUSCRIPT WHICH THE ABBOT DELIVERED TO IDA.

“History casts its shadow far into the land of song.”

—*Longfellow.*

NEAR six hundred years have come and gone since it was written. Even the original cannot be traced, but fortunately, our great Cheshire antiquarian, Sir Peter Leycester, saw it in the year 1662; and perceiving its historical importance, made a copy of it, which copy is now in the British Museum, where it can be inspected. It is numbered 2064 of the Harleian Manuscripts, and is written mostly in contracted Latin with some parts in Norman French. It has never appeared in print before. Written by the fifth Abbot, whose Christian name was Peter, and whose surname we do not know, we obtain from this beautifully simple and dignified composition, a greater and deeper insight into the character of the Abbot than any other description we can give. Notice there is not a word about himself. Occasionally the personal pronoun “I” occurs, but without any name.

See with what modesty he writes:—“I deem it sufficient for me to set down things here in unpolished words, so that the history of things may be easily understood by all who read these pages, for out of two imperfect things, it is much better to have a righteous rusticity than an erring

eloquence." What a splendid sentence! How applicable to our present day public life! Peter was Abbot in 1330, when the new Monastery at Vale Royal was first occupied, yet in referring to that great event he simply describes the Abbot as "the Abbot who then ruled," whereas a full account is given of the lives of the four preceding Abbots. The third Abbot, John de Hoo, is stated in the manuscript to be still alive when it was written. He resigned the office about 1316, apparently because of age and infirmity of body, and was succeeded by Richard de Evesham, who died and was succeeded by Abbot Peter, probably in the early part of 1324. Inasmuch as Peter was certainly Abbot fifteen years—that is until about 1339—and John de Hoo was alive when the manuscript was written, and because no personal mention is made of Abbot Peter, some considerable proof is afforded that the manuscript was not written by the Abbot who succeeded Peter. It must, therefore, have been written by Abbot Peter. This, however, is conclusively proved because the description of the lives of the first four Abbots is prefaced by the following remark: "We have thought fit to insert here some brief account of the virtues of the Abbots *who ruled before us*." We have, therefore, his own words exactly as delivered to Ida. The whole manuscript is invaluable as affording an insight into the lives of the first four Abbots who preceded Abbot Peter and the monks of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries which has never before been submitted to the public. The translation of the manuscript was exceptionally difficult and occupied several months, and was made by one of the ablest and most careful translators of historical manuscripts now living, namely, Miss Stokes, of 75, Chancery Lane, London.

Chronicle of the Foundation of the Abbey of Vale Royal

And of the Pleas made in the Manors and Churches to the
same belonging and of the Privileges granted to the
Fathers of the Cistercian Order.

“Since ignorance, the mother of all errors, is found to exist (witness the sacred writings) to the highest degree in priests of God and men dedicated to holy religion, and since man, the noblest of all created forms, was wholly made in the image of God, so nothing is thought more noble in him than to know himself and his Creator, so also nothing is more contemptible than crass and supine ignorance of both. Wherefore, if in laymen want of knowledge and ignorance is esteemed intolerable, according to canonical decrees, how much the more in those who have charge of them? For them there is no excuse, no pardon. And therefore, on account of the fleeting nature of man’s memory, writing was devised by God for the behoof of those who come after us, for without such memorials, ignorance of what is gone would overwhelm all in the future. Wherefore the Divine Wisdom, willing wholly to do away with this curse, commanded John, in the Apocalypse, saying :—‘ What you see, write in a book,’ and David in the psalm says, ‘ In thy book are all things written.’ And the laws of the Emperors decree that the judicial sentence which is not written shall have no force in law. Having this, therefore, in view, and having

first called upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, with the aid of His most beloved Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, concerning the foundation of the Abbey of Vale Royal, that nothing of its antiquity may remain unknown in time to come, I have thought fit to insert in these presents, as a future memorial of the matter, certain things useful for the avoiding of ignorance; not by Ciceronian method, nor do I intend to conjure with words of eloquence, nor to set forth my matter in inflated terms; because I deem it sufficient for me to set things down here in unpolished words, so that the history of things done may be easily understood by all who read these pages, for out of two imperfect things it is much better to have a righteous rusticity than an erring eloquence. With these few introductory words, let us inquire first concerning the commencement of the foundation of this Abbey, and in what year and by whom it was founded, for he deserved to be distinguished by the recording of his name. Then we must see the pleas and quarrels that were set on foot in the times of divers Abbots concerning the manors and churches granted to the aforesaid Abbey, from the time of the foundation thereof, which all appear separately and plainly in the margin of this present book. For instance, if there were any disturbances about the manor of Dernehale, whatever was done will be found under that title. And in like manner the arrangement followed will make things clear with regard to all the other manors and churches. And in the following pages will also be found inquisitions concerning the Abbey itself and other inhabitants of the county of Chester, and the diligent reader will find many other things to interest him, which I have not thought it worth while to set forth in this preface. At the end of the

volume also the Apostolic privileges granted to the Cistercian Order are written out at length."

(Here ends the preface.)

"Of the beginning of the foundation of the Abbey of Vale Royal, and of the King's Vow.

"The beginning of the foundation of the Abbey of Vale Royal was foreshadowed by the Virgin Mary by a miracle, for the Lord Edward, Prince of Wales and Earl of Chester (who had for his father the most Holy Henry, King of England, who was son of King John, and this Henry had reigned fifty-six years). Now this same Edward was so keen a fighter that, for love of the Cross, he had several times visited the Holy Land to exterminate the Pagans. And, on one occasion when he was returning back to England, he came down to the sea and he and all his people were duly taken on board; and when he was on his way to England, accompanied by a great concourse of people, storms suddenly arose at sea, so that all the ship's rigging was torn to pieces in a moment, so that the crew were helpless and unable to do anything, and utterly despairing of their safety, they called loudly upon the Lord, and those who were in the ship with him suggested that each one should vow to the Lord whatsoever the Holy Spirit might put in his mind; but when this had been done by them all most devoutly, the storm still did not cease, but rather waxed greater and greater. Then, seeing death approach so near, all those who were in the ship besought the Prince with tears and with earnest entreaties, to deign to make some vow, because he had not vowed anything with the others, for thereby he would both please the Lord

and deliver his companions from the imminent peril in which they stood. The most holy Prince acceded to their tearful prayers, and most humbly vowed to God and the Blessed Virgin Mary that if God would save him and his people and goods, and bring them safe to land, he would forthwith found a monastery of white monks of the Cistercian Order in honour of Mary, the Mother of God, in some suitable place in the Kingdom of England, which he would so richly endow with goods and possessions that it should be sufficient for the maintenance of one hundred monks for ever. And behold, the power of God to save His people was forthwith made manifest; for scarce had the most Christian Prince finished speaking, when the tempest was utterly dispersed and succeeded by a calm, so that they all marvelled at such a sudden change. And so the ship with all that was in it, though she was broken, torn, and disabled in many places, so that she was endangered by the water that rushed in everywhere, was miraculously borne to land by the Virgin Mary, in whose honour the Prince had made his vow, without any human aid whatsoever. And when they all saw these things they marvelled and rejoiced, and praised and glorified the Blessed Virgin, who never suffers her servants to perish. But in addition to all this, another miracle is said to have taken place in that same hour, which cannot be passed over in silence; for when they had all carried their goods safely out of the ship, the Prince remained behind in the ship, but as soon as the ship was empty, he left it and went on shore, and as he left, in the twinkling of an eye, the ship broke into two pieces, that by this it might be understood that the holy man, so long as he remained in her, by his merits preserved the ship whole. For after the said ship had

broken in two, the depths of the sea were forthwith stilled, and made no further manifestations that men could see.

“ How the Lord the King took to himself the Convent of the Monastery of Doré, and of the time when the same Convent came to Dernehale and thence to a small Abbey near Vale Royal.

“ After these things the said Prince set out towards England. Now dissension had arisen between the Lord Henry the King his father, and the English Nobles, the Earls and Barons, and the said Prince conquered them with a strong hand. But it happened that, in a certain fight, the aforesaid Edward was taken and sent to a prison in the city of Hereford, there to be kept far from his own people. But after a little while, by the merciful providence of God, he escaped out of the hands of his keepers ; still he remained for a little while under custody in the said city. Now there were some truly religious and holy men living near by in the Abbey of Doré, who frequently came to console the said Prince in his captivity, to the best of their ability, and, like Martha, often ministered to his necessities, and indeed deserved to find grace with him in return for the regard they had shown him. Therefore the said Edward, when he had re-established his power, began to think of fulfilling the vow he had made to the Virgin Mary at sea ; and in consequence of the devotion he cherished for the Monastery of Doré, on account of the kindnesses rendered by them to him in his captivity, he took to himself the convent of the said monastery, but the convent quitted the monastery of Doré for Vale Royal, 5 Ides of January, A.D. 1273, and 19 Kalends February that same convent came to Dernehale, and dwelt there for eight years

and more, which is the time between the day of their coming and the day of St. Robert, on which day they first came from Dernehale to Vale Royal. And A.D. 1277, to wit, 9 Kalends August, the place was consecrated, which used to be called Wetenhalewez and Munechenewro, for the building of a new Abbey by the venerable father Anian, Bishop of St. Asaph. And the aforesaid Edward gave to this place the name of Vale Royal, thus plainly giving all to understand that it was his will that there should be no monastery more royal than this one, in liberties, wealth and honour, throughout the whole world. But, alas ! death cut him off before he had realised this his wish.

*“ How the Lord the King laid the first stone in the new work,
and those who were present there.*

“ And afterwards in the same sixth year, to wit, on the Ides of August, A.D. 1277, the afore-named Edward, then most illustrious King of England, in an assembly of all the greatest people of the kingdom, with his own hands put the first stone in the place where the great altar was to be built. And the Lady Eleanor, also, Queen of England, who was likewise present there, placed two stones, one for herself and the other for her son Alfonso, in the same spot. The venerable father, Lord Robert Burnell, then Bishop of Bath and Wells, and Chancellor of the Lord the King, with the assistance of Anian, Bishop of St. Asaph, solemnly celebrated Mass. With the King also were the under-written :—Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Gloucester ; Edmund, Earl of Cornwall ; John de Warenne, Earl of Surrey ; William de Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick ; Sir Maurice de Croun, Otto de Grandison, John de Greyley, Robert Tipethoth, and Robert de Ver, who all, after the King, set

[illegible]

Photograph of page of copy of the Abbey
Ledger now in the British Museum.
This copy was made in the year 1662.
This page relates to the Laying of the
Foundation Stone by King Edward I.

stones in the place aforesaid of the great altar. And the King laid his stone in honour of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Glorious Virgin Mary, and of the Holy Confessors Nicholas and Nicasius the Bishops, and then he had the place thenceforward called Vale Royal, or in English Kingesdale. There were also at the time two foreign earls there with the King.

“Of the small Abbey in which the Monks dwelt during the time of four Abbots, and when they were transferred to the new Monastery.

“After these things had been done thus, the Lord the King had an Abbey prepared for this his convent, not far from the new work of Vale Royal. There the Abbot and convent remained for a long while, because there were as yet no buildings raised at all near the aforesaid new work. To this small abbey the convent was transferred from the manor of Dernehale 3 Ides of March, to wit, on St. Robert’s Day, 1281. And in that place they remained for all the time of four Abbots, to wit, Lord John Cheampeneys, the first Abbot, and also Lord Walter de Hereford, who was the second, and Lord De Hoo, who was the third in order, and Lord Richard de Evesam, who was the fourth. At last, under the protection of the most Glorious Virgin Mary, that reverend convent was transferred with great honour from this unsightly and ruinous abbey above said to the new monastery of Vale Royal, to wit, on the Feast of the Assumption of the Most Blessed Mary, Mother of God, A.D. 1330, and the Abbot who then ruled specially invited certain nobles and prelates, and other people of the neighbourhood, to this solemnity, and they came together in so great a multitude that the new

monastery could scarcely contain them. And amongst them came Master Richard, Abbot of Doré, of good memory, who solemnly celebrated Mass himself on that day, and made a sermon to the people touching the Blessed Virgin, saying that in her accustomed way she restored the devout with food of special nourishment. The convent thus celebrated the Feast of the Virgin, with those prelates who had come, and those men of renown, with jubilant singing of hymns and psalms, and with special canticles on the organs, and with almost all kinds of music, and they most devoutly blessed Her in whose honour the place was consecrated, by whose miracle at sea it had first been solemnly vowed. Now in that Feast of the Assumption there happened a wonderful thing, that is worthy of being related. For before the feast for almost forty days and nights there had been so great a flood all round about, that it was thought God had brought another flood upon the earth, like in the days of Noah. But a marvellous thing happened. For on the Vigil of the Assumption, and the two following days, the weather was so bright that not a drop of water fell upon the earth, but when all things necessary to the celebration of so solemn and great a feast had been fully accomplished, and all the people had returned home, the flood broke out again as before, and did not cease for a long while afterwards. And who can doubt but that this bright weather was most truly obtained by the merits and prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary, lest those who were devoutly serving her in these solemnities should be hindered in their services by the inclemency of the weather. And thus it is made to appear still more clearly how acceptable to her was the advent and coming of her monks to her monastery, founded in honour of her

miracle in the peril at sea. And so, I believe, one of the monks, when they came at last to this long-desired place, cried: ‘Here is my resting-place for ever. Here will I dwell since I have chosen her whom all men call the Blessed Virgin, saying, as is described in the Apocalypse: Those who are worthy shall walk with me in white raiment, and I will not wipe their names out of the Book of Life.’

“What sort of place it was before the foundation of the Abbey.

“Old men say that the place where the said monastery is now set, was the dwelling-place of , and now by the power of the Virgin Mary the place has been made the home of holy monks, and not of *any* monks, but of White Monks, as plainly appears in the chapter upon tithes. For such are all those preferred in the Cistercian Order, as the Court of Rome holds, and therefore abroad the White Monks are called the Monks of the Blessed Mary. Pope Benedict XII. was one of them, and a number of other chief pontiffs came from the Cistercian Order. Those, therefore, who presume to call them the Grey Monks, in contempt of the Apostolic see, are contemptible and foolish; for at the present time there are few or none received from the Order of the Grey Monks; for according to canonical institutes, as regards renunciation of property, the White Monks hold in the church the place of the twelve apostles, and they can admit to their order those coming to them from any other with few exceptions, but they themselves cannot enter other orders or they would be considered to have lowered themselves.

“Of the change of name of the place where the Abbey founded by the King is now set.

“The place where the Abbey is now set had two names in ancient days, for it was called Munethenwro, which means Monks’ wood, to indicate that in the future the place would truly be religious, or applied to religious purposes, because ‘Munethene’ means monk or nun, while ‘wro’ means wood. The place was also called Quetenne-halewes, which means holy wheat, or wheat of the saints; and this is a fitting name for it, because the body of Christ is built up of the pure grain of wheat, and of no other, and in God that wheat was thereafter to be blessed there, concerning which it is written in the gospel: ‘Unless the grain of wheat falling to the earth die, it abideth alone,’ and so the place is well called Quetenne-halewes. Or it is well called wheat of the saints, for ‘Quetenne’ is wheat and ‘halewes’ saints, as meaning that in this place wheat would be cultivated by means of which holy and religious men, dwelling in the body in this vale of tears, should be literally fed, so that thus by temporal means, the Saints would come to their kingdom or final dwelling-place. And very fittingly also the Lord the King had the place called Vale Royal, or in English Kingesdale, to signify that every reasonable creature pre-ordained by God Himself to life eternal ought to be Kingesdale, that is to say, a King ruling himself well in the vale of humility, and thus will deserve to hear these words from Christ: ‘Come, spouse of Christ, receive the crown, which the Lord has prepared for thee for ever.’ And none will receive this crown save those who have been willing to strive in the Vale Royal, that is to say, in the humility of Christ.

*“Of the Vision which was seen by the Shepherds and others,
in the place where the Abbey now stands.*

“Catholic and thoroughly trustworthy men tell that when the place which is now called Vale Royal was an empty waste, a great number of years before the Abbey was founded there, they have often heard their fathers tell that, on the solemn festivals of Mary, the Mother of God, in that same place, about the middle of the night, they and their shepherds would hear voices, which seemed to be singing in heaven, and a great light would appear to them, transforming the darkness of night into day: and this would be accompanied by the ringing of bells, and after the church was built, some, who survive to this day, declare that in the blackness of night they have seen a light so great that many who saw it thought the whole church was in flames. And it is a fact that people have come running up in the greatest wonder to see so magnificent a sight; others, dwelling a long way off, have been fetched out of their houses by their neighbours, and have praised God for the miraculous vision. This, indeed, I may say—that it appears to all men that that place was truly pre-ordained by Christ from all eternity for a Monastery, seeing it was thought worthy to be the scene of so many miraculous events to the eyes of mortals. And in further proof of this I will not omit at the end something which is worthy of a place at the beginning, to wit, that when the King of England, the founder of the said Abbey, had charged his monks who were then living at a convent in the manor of Dernehale, seeing that that place was not suitable for an Abbey, to provide for themselves out of all the Kingdom of England a place in which an Abbey could be suitably established, and they in

obedience to the King's commands, went about at great cost inspecting possible sites in divers places, still they never found a resting-place until they came to the place called Munechenewro and Quettennehalewes, which had been fixed by God from the beginning, as no sane man can doubt, for them to set up their tabernacles there for ever.

“Of the portion of the wood of the Holy Cross, brought by the King from the Holy Land, and given to the Monastery with other things.

“We will now cease speaking of the secret things of heaven, and declare further how the most pious King provided for the fulfilment of his vow. We have narrated shortly above, how the aforementioned Lord the King, while he was Earl of Chester, in his father's lifetime had gone to the Holy Land, but we have told nothing of what he did while there. Now while he was there, the King never ceased to war against the Pagans and Saracens in the name of Christ his Lord, and, like a good soldier of Christ, he dedicated himself to death on behalf of his Master. And when he came to the place where was kept the wood of the Cross on which the Saviour of the world was hung, his foot did not rest till he had violently carried off, with great joy, a beautiful piece of it, which he brought back with him to England with much rejoicing; and by virtue thereof, he overcame all those who rose up against him on all sides, so utterly that there was none like unto him of the kings of all the world; nor was this to be wondered at, for in every battle, round his bare neck, he bore with him the most sacred ensign of Christ, whereby the devil was overcome and the world redeemed by the blood of Christ. And this most holy portion of the Holy Cross he gave, with great

devoutness to the Abbey at her first foundation, so that she might strike terror into her persecutors and confer the gift of eternal life on those living holy lives. And besides this most precious jewel, the devout King sought everywhere for relics of the Saints canonically approved, and most graciously conferred them on his Monastery, and endowed it most nobly, moreover, with hallowed vessels and vestments and celebrated books. And moreover the most sweet Lady Eleanor, above all to be loved in Christ, then Queen of England, like a second Mary, who desists not from praying for sinners, so did the Queen not desist to implore the King for the confirmation of the Monastery. And this did not satisfy her desires, but she unceasingly adorned the monastery, and the monks, with immense honours and gifts. And therefore those most holy and devout men, noble minded and grateful for such great benefits, resolved among themselves that every year on the feast of the Translation of St. Thomas the Martyr, the anniversary of the aforesaid King should be solemnly celebrated in the said monastery, and that the same should be done for the Queen, 3 Kalends of December, on the Vigil of St. Andrew. And moreover it was determined and ordained that a special Mass should be celebrated every day for ever in the same monastery for the aforesaid Lord the King and for the Lady the Queen; and that everyone celebrating at the altar should say a special collect for the Lord the King, in addition to the special mention which they were bound to make daily of the King and Queen in the Memorial Service for the dead. At the canonical hours, also, the appointed collect is said for them by all. Moreover, at the end of grace after the meal, the president always used to say, 'May the souls of King Edward and

Queen Eleanor and of all the faithful deceased by God's mercy rest in peace;' to which they all made answer, saying — 'Amen.'

"Of the church of Kyrkham, since the King had granted it to his Monastery; and of the plea between the King and Sir Theobald le Botiler and Otto de Grandison.

"We spoke above a little about the various things given to the monastery; now we will tell something of those things we omitted. Now at a certain time the King, wishing to be informed of the value of all the rents belonging to the aforementioned place of Vale Royal, gave it in command to certain of his justices, to diligently inquire the truth concerning the premises, and they certified him accordingly. And when all this had been done, the King came to the conclusion that there was not sufficient to bear all the charges falling upon the said monastery. Therefore, having taken counsel, the King decreed that the advowson of the church of Kirkham should be bestowed upon it. When he heard this, Theobald, son of Walter le Botiler, openly defied the King's Majesty, declaring that that advowson was his, by hereditary rights, and producing many arguments for his contention. Then the King summoned his Council together, omitting those who were of no use for the purpose, and alleged that his father last presented a certain clerk of his to the aforesaid church by royal right, in the name of his Crown, as King; which clerk was admitted and instituted therein, and this not by reason of the custody of the heirs of Theobald, son of Walter. And the aforementioned Theobald, by his attorney before the Justices of the Lord the King acknowledged to the King that the King had presented in his own name, as is set forth above, and not by reason of custody, wherefore the advowson was

adjudged to the King, and Sir Theobald was in mercy. Now there was at that time, with the Lord the King, a good and holy man, and a most strenuous knight in arms, named Otto de Grandison, whose memory be blessed for ever. And he was sent as Ambassador to the Apostolic See touching the business of the kingdom. And when he arrived there, led, I believe, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he obtained from Pope Honorius the appropriation of the church of Kyrkham to the monastery of Vale Royal for ever. And when he returned to England after having favourably accomplished all the King's business, he most devoutly gave to the Abbot of Vale Royal the bull of the said church of Kyrkham. And the Abbot on his side, mindful of such great benefits, and considering that he held no knights in his own pay, offered a not inconsiderable quantity of gold and silver to the aforementioned knight. But he, preferring to be rewarded by God rather than by man, utterly refused to accept these things as vanities. Wherefore the Abbot, with the unanimous consent of his convent, determined and decreed that the memory of the said knight should be specially preserved and cared for in the said monastery for ever, and for that reason the deeds of that knight are recorded here, that thereby those who shall come in the monastery may be induced to pray without ceasing, that he may receive tenfold reward in heaven for all his labour here on earth.

“Of the Consecration of the place where the Abbey now stands and of the penalty to those entering otherwise than by the gates of the monastery.

“And now the most sacred King, considering that the blessing of the father strengthens the houses of his

sons, and wishing for that reason to leave his blessing behind him, called together the Archbishops, Bishops and other prelates of his kingdom to bless the site of Vale Royal, and they came together from their own districts at the King's commands and consecrated that place with their most holy benedictions. And afterwards they celebrated at the altar, and devoutly offered there their sacred vestments, in which they had been arrayed, to preserve their memories for ever there. And there was at that time among them a certain great man very dear to the King, Patriarch of Jerusalem, Lord Anthony de Beck, Bishop of Durham; and he, while the others were making offerings, gave his benediction and celebrated Mass. And after the Benediction had been solemnly performed, the aforementioned Bishops released forty days of the pains enjoined for ever as an indulgence to all who should frequent the aforementioned place for love of Christ and of the most most glorious Virgin Mary, His mother. Moreover, the Lord the King ordained the bounds of his same Abbey in these quadrangular precincts to wit, beginning at that place where the outer gate stands in the Wlgodr bar of the Abbey, and so following along the great ditch as far as the newly built convent grange, and the cross standing upon it, put there by the King as a sign of the limit at the first foundation, proceeding as far as the water of Wevere, and so following along the waters of Wevere as far as the ditch newly made about the Park, which ditch also takes its rise from the water of Wevere, and, then, following along the ditch around the Park as far as Abbey Mill, and from the Abbey Mill ascending in a straight line as far as the aforesaid outer gate in the bar where it began. And in order that that holy place, consecrated by so many and so great



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The Dedication of Dale Royal Abbey by King Edward the First, with portraits of the King and John Champneys, the First Abbot, reproduced for the first time from an original glass panel at Dale Royal in Cheshire.

fathers, should not hereafter suffer disrespect, or be trampled by the feet of the impious, all and singular the aforesaid prelates and fathers, at the King's suggestion, declared that henceforward none should enter save by the gates of the monastery, and solemnly fulminated the sentence of the greater excommunication upon those who should contravene this rule; the which sentence still lies upon all the inhabitants of the monastery, and also upon all those who disregard it to the present day. A long time afterwards the Bishop of Anaghdown consecrated six altars which had been completed in the new work and of his great favour provided them with indulgences.

“Of the first four Abbots who ruled in the same monastery; how they exercised their rule and the manner of their lives.

“Amongst works of charity it is not esteemed to be the least to set forth, in all details, the deeds of brave men, fighting for Christ in the Church, for the information of others, and for this we can produce the example of Christ, who willed that we should be informed of His doings by the Holy Gospels, that so, by their means, we, His rebellious world, might be instructed. Therefore we have thought fit to insert here some brief account of the virtues of the Abbots who ruled before us, in order that those now present and to come, instructed by their example, may learn, in the temple of Christ, to like things, so that by the assistance of the merits of these men, they may be led to attain eternal joy.

“Now the first of all the Abbots of Vale Royal was John Cheampeneys. And in truth by virtue both of his Christian name and of his surname he was rightly first Abbot of the aforenamed place; for John means, he in whom is grace,

or the grace of God; and by that grace of God, the monastery had been founded by the King's vow made at sea, by virtue of which innumerable people were miraculously saved from the peril of death. And therefore our Saviour willed that John should be the first shepherd to rule His monastery, in order that it might be made manifest through this, to all men, that not only the Abbot elected by God, but also the place itself, should enjoy favour, and because the grace of God had saved the King in the waves of the sea, by the same grace He governed the Abbot John on land. And the Abbot resembled that disciple who leaned upon Jesus' breast at supper; for among the other virtues he possessed, he was the humble follower of him who says: 'Say Amen, ye, who are gentle, and humble of heart, and ye shall find rest for your souls.' Those also who knew him in his life say that he never would avenge injuries done to him by those who were under him, but according to our Lord's precept, he left them to the Lord to avenge; therefore he deserved to find rest for his soul. And as John the Evangelist was chief of the Apostles and Disciples of Christ in chastity, so also this John, taking the vow of chastity, persevered purely therein to the end; and he is well called John and 'the grace of God,' for in the King's sight, he deserved to be decorated with so much grace, that the King endowed the monastery over which he ruled with such gifts and possessions that there was no prelate like unto him in all the earth. And his surname also of Cheampeneys became him well, for it means a champion. And indeed he was the boldest champion, for he overcame miraculously the three enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil; the world by the renunciation of worldly riches, the flesh by

the maceration of his own, and the devil by the renunciation of his own will. And in addition to this he overthrew other enemies, who would have attacked his house ; and so he was not unworthy of his name John, or the Grace of God, and of his surname of Cheampeneys, for, by the grace of God, he so bore himself that he justly deserved the title of the Champion of Christ, who obtained the victory everywhere. And so all things were a presage of things to come, to wit, that the place of Vale Royal should be found as pleasant to God and to man, so terrible and fearful to the persecutors of the Church and the enemies of Christ, that it could infallibly be said of the place : ‘Behold, this is of a certainty the house of God and the gate of heaven.’

“Afterwards, there succeeded to John the first Abbot, the second Abbot, Walter de Hereford, who was a man of most beautiful appearance, as regards externals, but seeing that such beauty is coupled with vanity, unless it be accompanied by the beauty that is hidden within, we will speak briefly of his other qualities. And he was greatly venerable in his life, always and everywhere devoted to God and the Blessed Virgin Mary, and in good works also he fought, a good fighter for Christ, for he used a hair shirt to conquer the flesh, and by this discipline subdued it to the spirit. He rarely or never ate meat, except on occasions permitted to him on account of sickness, and he gave himself up even to death, to be the good shepherd of his church, so that he deserved to be counted with Him who says, ‘I am the good shepherd and lay down my life for my sheep.’ For once it came to pass that the greater part of the district, or province, in which he dwelt, at the instance of a certain tyrant then justiciar there, raised the

standard of revolt against him and his monastery ; and when he came into the Court before the abovesaid tyrant, he and a great number of notable people whom he had brought with him were all struck with terror and fled, leaving the Abbot, their Lord, alone. But he, though deserted, being founded on the rock, intrepidly persevered to the end and defended his church aforesaid. And for this reason he is rightfully called Walter, which being interpreted means untamed, for it is never recorded that he feared the insults of men. On another occasion, a certain knight came with a great multitude of armed men, and wrongfully claimed the right of taking his way straight through the monastery, and when the Abbot heard this, he went out unarmed, with a few attendants, and so upheld the rights of his monastery that in a short time, they all turned and fled, which was brought about, there can be no doubt, by the character of the man. And therefore this Walter, that is to say the untamed, was right worthy to be made Abbot of this new monastery, for it was necessary, if in its newness it was to be undisturbed by all men, that he, untamed, should stand like a wall against them, and thwart their malice in the beginning, as medicine is prepared to overcome things in the beginning. It is recorded also that, on one occasion when the holy man was kneeling at prayer in his cell, in his accustomed way, when he rose from his knees behold he saw a demon blacker than pitch, sitting on the window of his cell, and when he had looked at it carefully, he asked him who he was, and he answered him : 'I am legion,' and the holy man bade him forthwith depart, and molest henceforth no one devoted to God in that place. And the evil spirit, not being able to contend against his holiness, immediately departed,

and did not dare to show himself there any more to the sight of man, according to the word of this man of God. And it was therefore not without reason that this Walter, that is the untamed, succeeded in saintly order to John, that is, the grace of God, in order that by this means, it might be made clear to all that the dauntless nature of Walter, by which he resisted his enemies and evil spirits, was not to be ascribed to himself but to the grace of God, so that in truth he might say—‘By the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace was not in vain in me.’ Nor was it without purpose that he took his origin from Hereford, for, from ancient times, that noble and royal city has been the dwelling-place of holy men amongst whom indeed he was brought up from his infancy, amongst whom he had dedicated himself to be the humble servant of Jesus Christ, so that thus through the merits of the saints he himself might also be made a saint, according as it was written, ‘With the saint, thou shalt be a saint, and with the innocent man, thou shalt be innocent.’ And holiness came to him, not only from dwelling among holy men, but also by his natural ‘imitation,’ whereby one can discern the character of his progenitors, for of a certain holy man, it was said that his whole kindred lives on in his holy life.

“And to this noble and religious man, there succeeded as third in order a man, good, gentle and simple, John de Hoo by name, who also ruled himself, and the holy convent committed to his charge, with great integrity, even as his predecessors had done; and he was so gracious and merciful to all, that he justly deserved to be called John, that is, he in whom dwells the grace of God, for he was of such an affectionate disposition that very often he was unable to restrain his tears for erring brethren, and yet so

stern was he at times, though gentle withal, that those whom he found straying from the path of God were removed for the time from his flock, that, by this means, their souls should be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. And this John, moreover, was in great favour with the King, who many a time said to him: 'Ask of me what you will, and I will give it you'; and he, guiltless of avarice, and utterly innocent of any other evil thing, simply asked the King's permission to resign his office; and when the King would not give his consent, he used always to allege his infirmity of body, and the ill-will of the common people, preferring rather to risk the King's favour than to forsake the solitudes of meditation, desiring to be numbered with those of whom our Lord speaks in the Gospel, saying: 'You who have left all things and followed Me shall receive one hundredfold, and shall possess eternal life.' At last the King, being overcome by the importunate requests of the man of God, directed to the Abbot of Doré his special letters for receiving the Abbot's resignation as soon as possible; moreover in compassion for his simplicity, in reverence to God, and for love of the Abbot John, he wholly released to the monastery £400, in which they were bound to the afore-named King for a certain escheator, who had been removed, likewise desiring that he should always be provided with all things necessary during his life at his own discretion, as he had so well deserved, which was done accordingly. And therefore, this John was not unworthy to be called one in whom dwells the grace of God, for he obtained such grace in the King's sight as no one had obtained before. His surname was Hoo, which being interpreted means a rousing-up, for if one wants to rouse a man up, one calls out 'Hoo,' that is

to say: 'Arise and make ready.' And he was fittingly called Hoo, because he had been roused by the voice of God, and had heard Him saying: 'Unless a man shall renounce all that he has, he cannot be My disciple'; and having heard this he left all things and followed Christ the Redeemer, for which reason he deserves to be called John, that is, the grace of God. And it was well that this John succeeded Walter, who, according to the interpretation of his name, was the untamed, for unless prelates be merciful, men will not be found to bear the penalties canonically appointed for their sins. But this John appeared so merciful and gentle that he would even conceal men's sins by awarding secret penance, bearing in mind the words of our Lord, when He said: 'Be ye merciful even as your Father is merciful; and judge not and ye shall not be judged; and beware of condemning sinners, for we all err: we either are, or were, or may be, as this man is.' But seeing that it is written: 'Praise not a man while he lives, but praise him after his death'—since the aforesaid venerable man John is still alive, we will not speak further of him, lest the writer be charged with hypocrisy, for the hypocrite deceives his friend with his lips, and lest he who is praised be uplifted with pride. . . .

"Now while these three pearls offer themselves on the other side on the altar of Christ as a holy offering, pleasing to God, and rest in the peace of the Church with God, we will leave them so and hasten to set forth the praises of the fourth Abbot, to wit, the wise and just man who was the fourth to rule over the monastery of Vale Royal, and this was Richard de Evesham, who, from the flower of his youth up has loved his Creator with all his heart, and at length succeeded in winning from God the better part,

which, like Mary, he had chosen. While he hid his virtues under a bushel, lest he should receive praise from men in this world, in place of the reward he hoped for, and because he is perfect who does not offend with his mouth, he who is dumb and has no reproach on his lips, he never opened his mouth for vanity. Moreover, he read day and night in the law of the Lord, that thereby he might keep his body and soul spotless to God. For he had read how the Saint, loving the sanctity of the Scriptures, did not love the vices of the flesh and overcame his body by vigils and by fasting, no less than by the harshness of a hair shirt, and he himself, by his continual meditations upon the things of heaven, left this world wholly behind. Nor is it wonderful how he became oblivious of it, for we are taught by the Apostle, that no one fighting for God troubles himself about the affairs of this world, for, according to the voice of the truth, no man can serve both God and Mammon. And so this man, regularly renouncing his dignity in favour of his love of virtue, remained in holiness of living without ceasing, to the last moment of his life. And therefore it may truly be said of him who did not seek for gold, nor place his hope in treasure of money, that he did wonderful things in his life as appears by what follows:—A certain monk of this man of God was attacked by very severe illness while he himself was far away; a confessor came to him, and to him the monk solemnly confessed all his sins, and immediately afterwards went the way of all flesh. After this the Abbot returned to his own monastery, and when he heard of the death of that brother of the house, the depths of his heart were moved with sorrow. And on the following night, it is recorded that the white monk who had died appeared to him as he was

resting a little after the break of day, taking form in the white garments of his habit, and, bending his whole body to the earth, the dead monk, with pious prayers, humbly besought absolution from the Abbot, who rose at once from his place, and after having narrated all things to the brethren as they happened, absolved the aforementioned deceased in the Chapter, and so compelled him to fly forth free to heaven. And from this it is very plain that his life was very pleasing to God, because a man who had already put off the things of this world came so earnestly to seek the benefit of his absolution. There is also another miracle which we are told, on good authority, happened in the time of this man of God. It came to pass that for three years there was a famine so terrible in the land, that great numbers of people died of want, and there was great danger from the stench of the dead bodies; but he defended his people so effectively from this plague, when he had in truth little or no means, that no one doubted that the means were sent down from heaven to earth by Almighty God on account of the merits of this blessed man. And at another time, this man of God, before he became father of the monastery, was sent by his Abbot against certain tyrants to collect tithes in a place not far distant from the said monastery. And when he reached that place the tyrants rose up and would have crowded down upon him, but they could not; they shot arrows into the horse on which he sat, but he himself by God's mercy miraculously escaped unhurt. And by these and other tokens this man, the Lord Richard, proved that he could truthfully be called Richard, which means laughing, dear and sweet, for in this life he himself abstained from laughing, and, like our Lord, his sadness was not turned to joy. Sweet also he was, for

he had clung perfectly only to Him of whom the Church sings, saying: 'Good and upright is the Lord, therefore will He teach sinners in the way'; and again, 'My spirit , ' and he had that sweetness of holiness which he derived from Our Lord himself, and can be called dear to God, and therefore, let not malice change our comprehension of him for ever, nor has he been taken away from us, but called by God to the heights of heaven, where he reigns with Him in glory for ever and ever.

"Therefore these four Abbots, who fought each in their own day so manfully for the Abbey of Vale Royal, that for her sake they were ready even to penetrate iron walls, may be compared to the four angels which John saw in the Apocalypse standing on the four corners of the earth holding the four winds of heaven, lest they should blow upon the earth or hurt anyone. And the sound of them, like that of the four Evangelists, went out into all the earth, to overcome the peoples, and all the enemies of the said monastery. And to them may be applied the words spoken by the Angel to John: 'These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb, and so that they may not toil in vain in their Lord's vineyard and without their daily penny. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; where they shall hunger no more, nor thirst, neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat, for the Lamb, who is in the midst of the King's throne, shall lead them unto the fountains of the waters of life, with whom they shall be crowned and shall live for ever and ever. Amen.'"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ST. MARY'S CONVENT AGAIN.

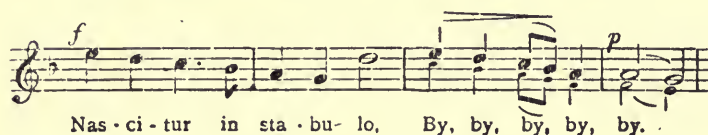
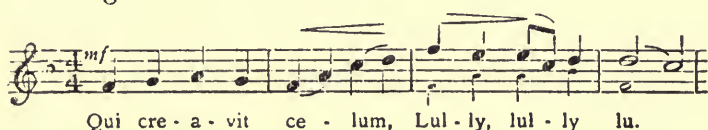
'Life is like a sheet of paper white,
On which each one may write
His word or two; and then comes Night.'

A FEW years rolled by whilst Sister Ida carried on faithfully her daily work at St. Mary's. She was affectionately and sincerely loved, not only by the Lady Superior, but also by the other sisters. Accounts had to be accurately kept each week of all the receipts and expenditure connected with the convent. Tenants and workmen had to be interviewed and instructions given. Sometimes there would be building repairs to be executed, at others, purchases to be made of the provisions and foodstuffs required for consumption. Difficulties and disputes had occasionally to be arranged. Diplomacy was required to obtain the necessary charters, establishing the rights and privileges of the convent. In many of these matters Ida had to take her share under the direction of Dame Marie. She had also to assist in giving instruction to the children of the richer citizens sent there for educational purposes. They were taught needlework, confectionery, surgery (for there were no apothecaries or surgeons—the gentlewomen did cure their neighbours), writing, drawing, embroidery, etc. Sometimes visitations to the sick were

much needed, and in those days sanitation was not known, and disease and death were often rampant. The city streets were badly paved and ill-lighted; foul and objectionable refuse and garbage abounded everywhere; the walls were in a dilapidated condition; the gates dangerously rotten; disturbances not infrequently arose through the turbulence of soldiers or an unsavoury horde of vagrants. Public places were made horrible by the sight of gibbets on which the heads and quarters of executed criminals were fixed. At night, when the parish lantern—the moon—was not lighted, His Worship the Mayor not infrequently charged the city funds for links to light him on his way home from city banquets, more particularly, so as to avoid the frequent holes and the heaps of mud and filth. Over these ratty streets, sick women had to be carried in barrows.

Surrounded with these difficulties, Sister Ida did her share, and often more, of external duties, besides being engaged in the religious and secular work of the convent. She too, with her fine voice, so exquisitely modulated when needed, formed one of the choir. Different instructions were issued to the singers for different seasons of the year. The old Processional in use in the nunnery prescribed that: "On Candlemas Day when candles byn halowed, the prest shal begyn thus." Then follow the words of the anthem. Next we have, "Oute at ye churche dore with thys antym," "At the frater dore begyn this antym," "At the parlour dore begyn this antym." Definite instructions were given as to "Palme Sunday, when Palmes is blessed." Fortunately the Earl of Ellesmere now possesses an old manuscript Processional wherein is inscribed the following words: "This booke

longeth to Dame Margery Byrkenhed of Chestre.”* In 1899 the Henry Bradshaw Society published a print of it, and those who have examined the original are clearly of opinion that it was in use at St. Mary's Nunnery at Chester. The directions on Palm Sunday and Shere Thursday make it plain that the book was written for a convent of women. Towards the end of the manuscript is a Christmas carol, which Dr. Bridge, now the eminent organist of Chester Cathedral, has rendered into modern notation, adding an alto part, in small notes, so that it may be sung with effect, even at the present day. He further states it may possibly be one of the earliest carols heard of in the history of music, and with his kind permission his rendering is set out below :—



Joseph emit panniculum, by, by, etc.

Mater involuit puerum, lully, etc.

Et ponit in presepio, by, by, etc.

* In a letter dated 30th July, 1911, Dr. Bridge kindly informs the Author that Mr. Fergusson Irvine has recently discovered that Dame Margery was a certain Margery Grosvenor, and married Sir Ralph Birkenhead, the first Recorder of Chester (1505-1514), and was sister to Elizabeth Grosvenor (the daughter of Richard Grosvenor, of Eaton, died 1542), the last Abbess or Prioress of St. Mary's Nunnery.

Inter animalia, lully, etc.
 Jacent mundi gaudia, by, by, etc.
 Dulcis super omnia, lully, etc.
 Lactat mater domini, by, by, etc.
 Osculatur parvulum, lully, etc.
 Et adorat dominum, by, by, etc.
 Roga mater filium, lully, etc.
 Ut det nobis gaudium, by, by, etc.
 In perenni gloria, lully, etc.
 In sempiterna secula, by, by, etc.
 In eternum et ultra, lully, etc.
 Det nobis sua gaudia, by, by, etc.

The first verse is translated thus:—

“He who made the earth and sky,
 He who reigns as King on high,
 In a stable now must lie.”

Dr. Bridge states “that the other verses are of a similar character. It is all in unison throughout. There are no male parts.”

In the manuscript, the Rubrics for Shere Thursday, are given the names of thirteen altars in the church, dedicated respectively to St. Mary, St. John the Evangelist, St. James, St. Nicholas (one of the patron saints of Vale Royal), St. Benedict, St. Margaret, St. Thomas of Canterbury, St. Katherine, St. Anne, St. Mary Magdeleyn, St. John the Baptist, All Hallowes, and St. Edmund. Processions of the sisters round the church and the adjoining churchyard took place on Holy Days. The church, and especially the altars, had to be kept absolutely clean and free from dust. Indeed the whole of the convent must be, and was, a model in that respect.

Nor must it be forgotten that there were innumerable visits made by the nuns to the poorest in the city, especially where they were tenants of the convent. In Hand-bridge alone there were fifty tenants paying rents to the

convent ranging from two shillings to forty shillings a year. There were several "hemp yards" attached to these houses, where ropes were made for the ships coming to, or using, the port of Chester. There were other tenants in Bridge Street, Eastgate Street, Claverton Lane (now known as Duke Street), Foregate Street, Fishmongers Lane, (now Newgate Street). There were also nine houses in Guppings Lane, the rentals of which were dedicated to the upkeep of "Oure Lady's Light." Then there were some twenty-four tenants of the poorest class in Nuns' Lane, close to the Nunnery. Twenty-three of those tenants only paid three shillings a year rental. One tenant, named Margary Moore, only paid two shillings a year; it was all it was worth, for it was in a shocking state of repair, indeed it would have been pulled down altogether, but the poor widow tenant prevailed upon the Lady Superior to let it remain as she could not afford to pay for a larger or better cottage. Margary had been left with a family of four little children, and the most she could do was some laundry work, and serving, so as to keep the home together. Menial work at the nunnery was occasionally given to her, and in this way she was known to the sisters, who took an interest in her welfare. Unfortunately, she was stricken down with disease herself. Sister Ida was sent to attend to her wants and relieve her necessities. Upon the miserable straw bed in the corner of the room lay the sick mother, whilst playing about in the same room were the children, like "little steps of stairs," almost unconscious of her serious condition. Chicken broth, milk and a few other tasty delicacies were taken by Ida, who gently and soothingly made her patient as comfortable as circumstances would permit. What were those poor "circumstances"? No medical man, or even that

apology for one, termed an apothecary. Scant and rude medical knowledge, and even that based upon the superstition of past ages. For medicine, a decoction derived from herbs and dried flowers; another called "Infernal Fire"—probably a caustic; hairs of a saint's beard, dipped in water and taken inwardly. Operations were confined to pricking the feet with needles or the application of hot iron; mortified flesh cut out with a rusty sort of a knife; humours expelled by burning; baths, bleeding and fomentation to restore strength. Well might poor Ida wring her hands and bathe her face with tears. The fount of science had not begun to flow. Cannot we therefore understand why the prayers of the righteous man or woman were then a saleable commodity, not so much thought of to-day. In that age healing by faith, supplications backed up by religious payments given to Heaven,—but retained on earth—were the only available remedy for the poor.

" 'Tis Heaven alone that is given away,
'Tis only God may be had for the asking;
No price is set on the lavish summer;
June may be had by the poorest comer."

And yet there was one angel in the poor widow's house—one whose face beamed with a smile, even when darkest clouds gathered around—one who thought not of herself but of others. She was the Nun Ida.

"The Holy Supper is kept indeed,
In whatso' we share with another's need;
Not what we *give*, but what we *share*,
For the gift without the giver is bare;
Who gives himself with his alms feeds three—
Himself, his hungering neighbour, and *Me*."

It was this angel of light and life who drove away the



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Eda, the Benedictine Nun.

angel of death and disease. It was a fight between the good and the bad angel. It was a terrible struggle. Soon the smile of joy and recognition was restored to the face of poor Margary, but not until Ida had spent days and weeks of toilsome visits, wearing out her frail constitution with hard work, breathing an atmosphere charged with unwholesomeness. The sun finally came in at the cottage window, but the sickness was only transferred to the Nunnery Infirmary. Ida herself was ill. A delicate framework, full of the finest tissues associated with a gentle and noble life, was struggling hard to live, but the mental strain and shock of the terrible events of bygone events had left their mark. Even the bed she lay upon was the very same one she had first occupied. It was whilst lying there she had received from Father John the Holy Cross which still hung round her neck where it had been first placed. She was, too, still wearing the bridal ring. It had never been taken off her finger since Father John, as Lord Abbot, had put it on. Would she have sold it? Ten thousand marks would not now have secured its removal. Two emerald stones of considerable size and beauty, shaped like two separate hearts, were touching each other. They were exquisitely placed in a gold setting. A few buttercups and daisies were lying about on her bed, within her reach, sent by poor distressed Margary. And she would play with the daisies—always and for ever the flower of her inmost thoughts. And there too were Hilda and Joan, trying to bring the sunshine to their own daisy flower. But it faded and faded.

Dame Marie herself was exceedingly anxious for her recovery. Ida's mother was sent for, and the little relief and change seemed to bring about some slight improvement.

There was a little more light. Life seemed a tiny bit brighter. There was just the "silver lining." But it didn't last long. One day she whispered with difficulty to her mother, as though thinking of the past :

"Mother, do you think I could see Father John? Do you think that after I have banished him—abandoned him—given him up cruelly to follow the path of Duty—he would come and see me?"

In broken tones full of anxiety and grief she replied : "Yes, darling Ida, I am sure you can see him. I will tell my Lady, and I know he will come as soon as he knows you are so ill."

"Ah, but, mother, you don't know how badly I treated him. He looked after, protected and saved me for three long years : he got me everything I wanted, and then I told him differently to what I had ever told him before. I told him I didn't love him. I made a false excuse to get rid of him. I made it out I must do my 'Duty.' He loved me so much that he would have given up his proud position as Abbot to marry me—but I was cruel—I think I must then have had a heart of cold gold, for as soon as I thought I could do without him—as soon as I had got from him all I needed—I left him and you. And, now I can't live long, I see the great wrong I have done. May God forgive me."

Her mother simply said : "Ida, I know him so well—long before you did. I am sure he will come."

Strange knowledge! How did she know he would come? Would he leave all his other work just to see a poor sister who couldn't do anything for him in return? Could it be expected that the powerful and rich prelate would make a troublesome journey on horseback to see



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Statue of "Our Lady's Wood."

someone who had preached to him of Duty and practised Desertion ?

A messenger was despatched to Vale Royal with a note from my Lady, requesting his attendance at once and explaining the cause. The Lord Abbot was in the Chapter House attending to pressing business of the Abbey, but after he had read the note, he begged to be excused, and politely asked the Prior to preside in his stead. In vain he himself asked the messenger for further particulars ; all that could be told him was that Sister Ida was very ill, and everybody in the nunnery was in the deepest distress. There was no indecision as to what he should do. Not a moment was lost. He never doubted but that Ida was the same as she had been. He could not imagine she could change with the wind, even if other Idas did. So the Lord Abbot mounted his best horse, dispensed with the service of his seneschal and retinue, and, simply accompanied by the assistant porter, made his way as quickly as possible to St. Mary's.

On arriving there, he flung the reins of his horse to his attendant and sought an interview with my Lady, who briefly, yet sympathetically, told him that she feared that the too faithful discharge of her duties and vows, her attendance and sympathy with poor Margary, had told upon Ida's health, broken down by previous trials, of which the Lord Abbot knew, and that Ida herself had specially requested that he might be sent for. She hoped he would pardon the trouble, but the Lord Abbot silenced that remark by stating that he should not have pardoned the Lady Superior if she had not troubled him. He was taken to her bedside ; she was just dozing. Without disturbing her, he quickly noticed the great change. He

saw, too, the daisies, and one, the freshest of the lot, just lying lightly between two thin sweet fingers. He specially noticed the emerald ring, treasured, not for its monetary value, but as a gift from himself. He gently removed the ivory cross which lay close to two sealed lips, red still with the blush of youth. He knelt reverently and lowly by the side of the bed, and in silent sacred prayer asked God to restore Ida—dear Ida—to her wonted health and strength. How he prayed, or what more he said, God only knows, but it is written above. In a few minutes, she languidly opened her eyes, and there was just a smile of recognition.

He motioned to her not to speak, and then produced a small phial, full of a special cordial he had brought with him. This she took with great difficulty, but its effect was soon apparent.

He motioned to her mother to leave them alone for a few moments. Then, surrounded by the blind, dumb walls, she placed her hand in his, saying so gently, "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." The great Lord Abbot was stricken down with a grief he dared not show. His tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, and refused him utterance of speech. At last she said: "Father John, you see the low estate of your little handmaiden," to which he replied: "Yes, Ida dear, I also see my daisy flower very much shrivelled, but you must cheer up, the God of Heaven and the Holy Mother will bless and protect you. The cordial I have just given you is a very powerful one, and seldom fails to answer its purpose."

Ida said: "Father John, it's very sweet of you to come and see me. I don't deserve it—I really don't. You know I ought to be the last to give you any pain or trouble. I wouldn't have sent for you but I feel that I can't stay here

very long. I wanted so much to see you and to thank you for all your kindness to me, which I can never repay. The cordial will not restore me ; it will fail this time. I know it will, so I wanted to see you specially."

"Oh, Ida," he said, "whilst there is life there is hope, and you seem ever so much better already."

"Ah," she said, "it's only the temporary effect of your cordial, but because of you and your kindness, I won't give in, unless Christ wills it otherwise. I still want to see Father John and the pretty daisies, but sooner or later I must go to the garden of Heaven. Before I go——" And then she stopped.

"Well, Ida," the Abbot said, "what, before you go?"

"Before I go, John, I want you to forgive me."

"Forgive you, Ida, what for?"

"Oh, you know I was so cruel to you. I professed to love you. You thought it was real love. I led you to believe in me. But it wasn't, and I falsely pleaded Duty. I knew you dared not refuse that plea. I told you I wanted to go 'straight.' I had led you on and on. But I never was worthy of your love. Do forgive me. I see now how wrong it all was. I can never forgive myself, but your forgiveness will help me to die happily."

"Well, Ida, what you say surprises me. I could not, as you know, say one word against your desire to follow Christ and do your duty. I thought that it was just as hard for you as for me, yet it seems it wasn't. Ida, I forgive you frankly and freely."

"Thank you so very much," said Ida ; "you can't tell what a burden it takes off my heart. And then, Father, I wonder if you remember the promise you once made."

"What promise?" the Abbot said.

"Oh," she said, "the promise that whatever I did I should be buried in front of the High Altar at Vale Royal so as to be near to you. Do you think I am worthy of that?"

"Ida, my own sweet daisy, you are not dead yet, but I'll say this: that if you die before me, your wish shall be most reverently carried out. But, dear Daisy, don't think of it yet."

"Yes, John—just once more—but it is my duty to think about it, and you know I always had a strong sense of duty. I couldn't be to you all you wished me to be. Something stood in the way, but Duty doesn't stop me from giving you and your Abbey all that is left of me, when soul and spirit have joined the dear little children I dreamed about, around the throne of God. So, John, when I am gone, as go I know I must, I trust to you to see this my last wish is carried out. So shall I be near the only man in the world I respect and adore."

There was a tight squeeze of his hand, a slight pressure which pulled him down, and the last kiss was given!

He noticed another change; he rushed for her mother, and hastily administered the extreme unction. The cordial had failed!

The Bride of Heaven had left to meet the Bridegroom! The garden of Heaven was richer by one more delicate lovely flower!

The rich Abbot was poor. The world was poorer, too, by the loss of a noble true woman.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE NUN'S GRAVE.

"The souls of those that die
Are but sunbeams lifted higher."

IN a manuscript book still to be seen at Vale Royal, and written by the Honourable Essex Cholmondeley in the early part of the nineteenth century, is inscribed the following sentence:—"At Vale Royal, in Cheshire, on a calm summer evening, there is sometimes heard plaintive dulcet music hovering over the Nun's Grave, and now and then a deep responsive sigh from the depth of the earth."

Father John and Sister Ida are whispering to us to-day of the great God, the dear Saviour of the world, and the Holy Maiden Mother.

Requiescant in pace.









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